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GRACE

PASSENGER
LET HER GO

LAMB OF GOD
NEVERMORE

TOTAL Guitar

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ACOUSTIC 2022

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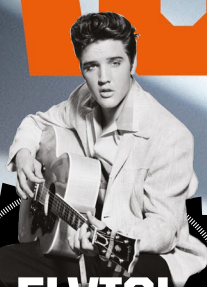

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PORCUPINE TREE RETURN
Steven Wilson reveals all!

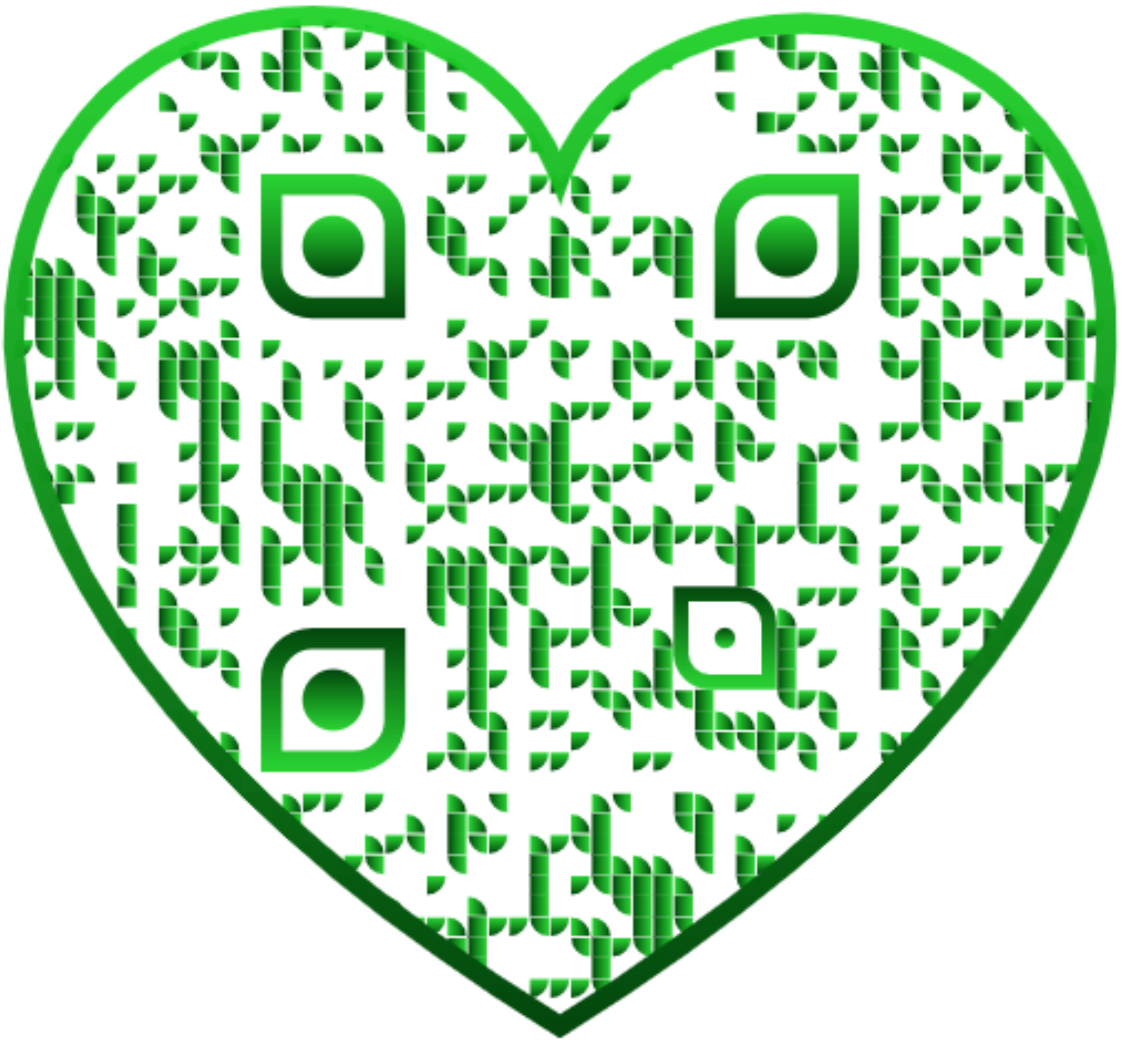
+ PROG'S RISING STARS...
and how to play like them!

FEATURING

Vance Joy

Tash Sultana

Ed Sheeran's Equals Edition Lowden



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Welcome...

As I write this, the UK is in the middle of a bout of lovely sunny weather. There's talk of a heatwave. Now, I have friends visiting this weekend. I imagine we'll sit in the garden and enjoy a beer or two. And I'm fairly certain that at some point my acoustic guitar will be taken out of its case for an *al fresco* jam session (and yes, I'm fully prepared for the inevitable *Wonderwall* request – though, now I think of it, where *is* my capo?). Anyway, I don't know what it is, but there's just something about the summer sunshine that makes me want to grab my acoustic and get strumming.

As you might imagine then, I'm especially happy about all the great new acoustic music around at the moment – and this month we've interviewed four artists who are bringing fresh perspectives to our instrument. Cover star Vance Joy has a refreshing lack of reverence for his Martin, Maton and Gibson acoustic guitars. For him it's all about songcraft. Tash Sultana's recent *Unplugged* album sees them reimagining songs on their own terms with part-acoustic/part-electric arrangements. Polyphia virtuoso Tim Henson is both inspiring and awe-inspiring as he breaks new ground on his new prototype Ibanez nylon string. And, with a radical take on bluegrass, Billy Strings is making traditional American roots music relevant to a new generation.

Finally, we have a couple of practical features for you. We've compiled our top tips for acoustic guitar gigs and created an in-depth nine-page technique workout covering everything from fingerstyle and flatpicking to the ins and outs of modern percussive guitar.

Enjoy the issue and I'll see you when the sun's gone in!

Chris Bird Editor

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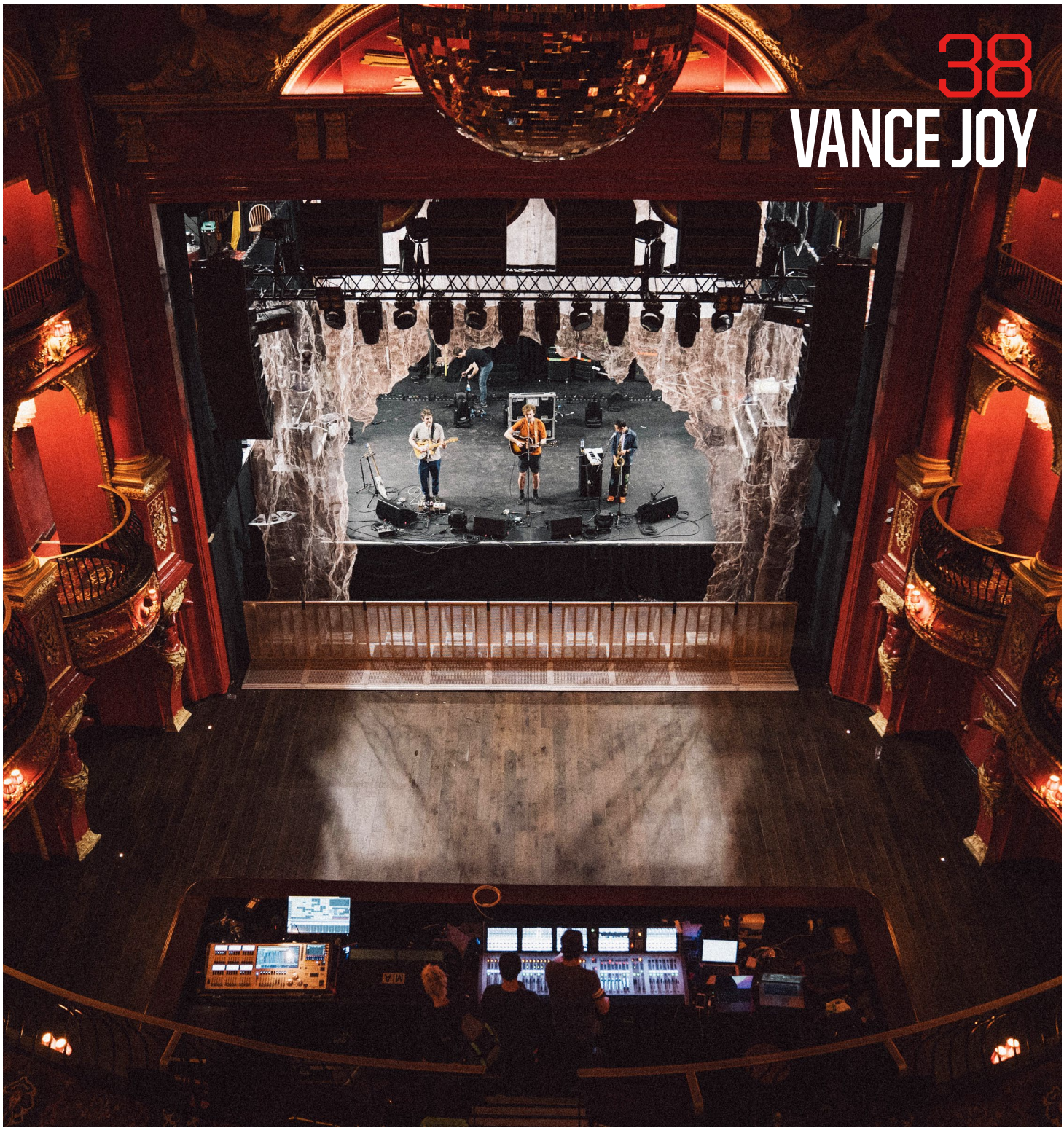
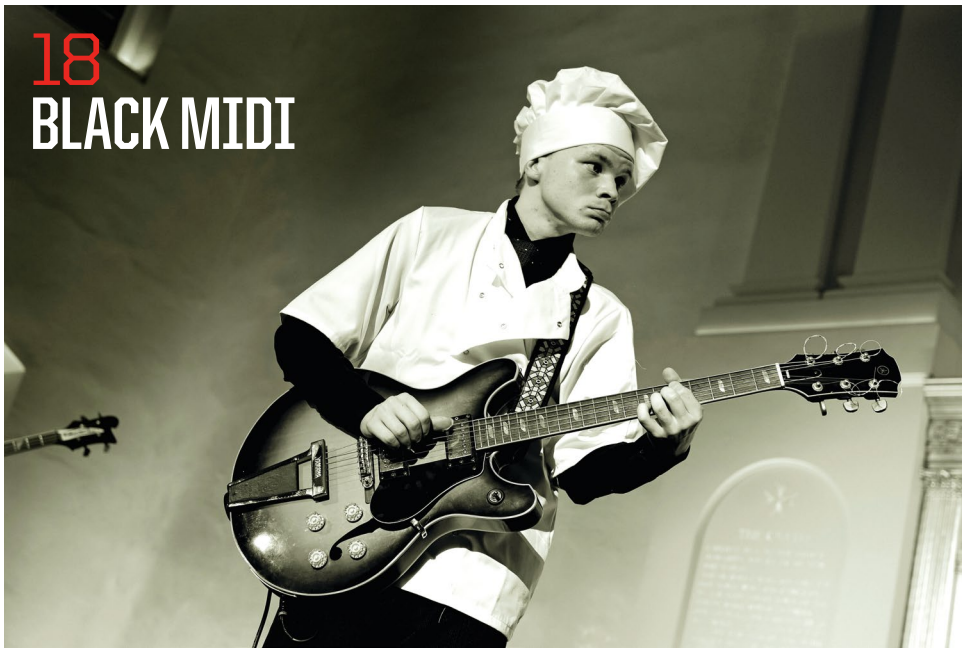
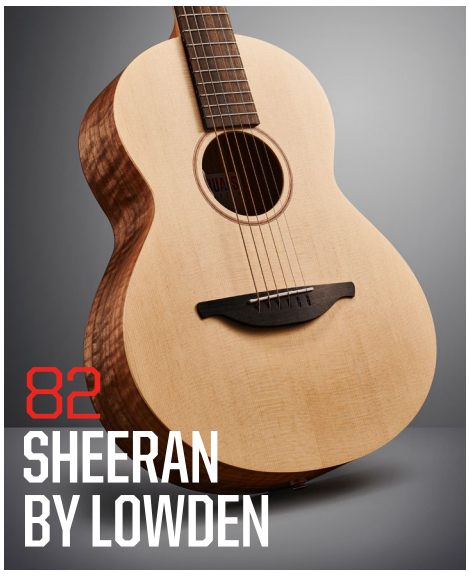


38 VANCE JOY

Cover image Kieran Frost/Redferns





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Type this link into a web browser on any computer, smartphone or tablet and you'll be directed to TG's website at guitarworld.com. Here you'll find all the audio and video for the issue, available to download or stream.

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Words Paul Elliott Photo Gareth Cattermole / Getty

ALIVE!

It's been a summer of mega-gigs. Paul McCartney at Glastonbury and The Rolling Stones at Hyde Park on the same night. Noel Gallagher at Glasto and his kid brother at Knebworth. Iron Maiden, Kiss and Biffy Clyro at Download. Muse at the Isle Of Wight, Red Hot Chill Peppers and Green Day both at the London Stadium, Guns N' Roses at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium...

And on July 8 it was Pearl Jam who starred at Hyde Park, with singer Eddie Vedder wielding his P-90-loaded Tele in the band's triple-guitar line-up. The setlist included *Superblood Wolfmoon* and *Retrograde* from their most recent album *Gigaton* alongside 90s classics *Even Flow*, *Jeremy*, *Daughter* and *Alive*. And for the encore, they were joined by another guitar player – tennis legend John McEnroe jamming on the Neil Young anthem *Rockin' In The Free World*. Game, set and match!

SCENE
YOUR NEWS IN GUITARS

GUITAR

"I'M PLAYING REALLY LONG SOLOS!"

ERJA LYYTINEN'S NEW SOUND IS ALL ABOUT "PUSHING MYSELF"

Finnish slide blues phenom Erja Lyytinen spent lockdown upping her shred skills, and is ready to show them off on her self-produced 12th album *Waiting For The Daylight*, which is due for release on October 7. She discusses her hard-rocking new sound and explains why two pedalboards are better than one…

What did you do differently on this new record?
In the past few years, my sound – and the whole way I approach the guitar – has been developing. I've been wanting to learn more about how to play technically. I started to do technique practice a few times per week, and every time before going on stage. Little by little, I began pushing myself by making much trickier guitar parts, and I think you can hear this on the album.

Were you listening to less Bonnie Raitt and more Joe Satriani?
Yes! They are both great guitar players. With this album, there are some really long guitar solos, and I wanted to honour the hard rock bands of the sixties and seventies. My mother is a rock 'n' roll woman, and when I was a kid we listened to Deep Purple, Black Sabbath and Uriah Heep – all these cool rock bands. I didn't want to restrict myself to making radio hits. If the song required a longer guitar solo, I let it happen!

Which solo are you most proud of?
On the song *Bad Seed* I played two different solos. It's what Eric Johnson does on his albums and I got the idea from that. I like playing regular guitar and I like playing slide, so why not mix them in the same song? There's a bit of an Indian vibe to the chords under the first part, and I used the Indian scale. This very fast lick came and wanted to be in the solo. There's probably the most notes I've ever played in those four bars, so that was pretty cool! Then on top of that, I played slide, and the guitars melt into each other.

What's your number one guitar?
The G&L Z-3 Semi-Hollow is my most dear one because I've played with it for most of my career. I got it around 2005 and I've done basically all my international shows with it. I feel that it's been quite safe to travel with – it doesn't give a f*ck about flights!

What's your set-up like for playing slide?
The action is quite high. I use a D'Addario 0.012 set of strings, but the high E string is a 0.015, so I get a better, clearer sound. Then I use a regular Dunlop glass slide. I mainly use a 1968 Super Reverb with 4x10 inch cabinets, and because it's a spring reverb, it sounds beautiful. I have two pedalboards that Kimmo Aroluoma from Custom Boards designed for me, which I combine together. It's easier to carry it all, having two separate ones! I have a couple of distortion pedals: a Little Green Wonder from Mad Professor and an Xotic SL Drive. Then I have a wah, and I like using a DigiTech Whammy for different harmonies.
Ellie Rogers

Erja Lyytinen

GUITAR

RETURN OF THE CHAP

CHAPMAN GUITARS OVERHAULS ONE OF ITS EARLIEST MODELS FOR A SHARP-LOOKING MODERN SINGLECUT

There aren't many modern guitar success stories that match up to Chapman Guitars. As we all know, the brand was the brainchild of Rob Chapman, who began designing guitars by committee with the help of his forum members and followers way back in 2009 before teaming up with Lee Anderton to launch the brand proper. 13 years on, and Chapman is fully developed with a cohesive line-up of great-playing, sounding and looking guitars.

But while 13 years may seem like a relatively short time in terms of company history, it's long enough to be looking back, as Chapman's latest release revisits one of its earlier models for an overhaul and relaunch with the ML-2 Pro.

The ML-2 is Chapman's take on a contemporary single-cutaway guitar, which originally launched a decade or so ago before being discontinued in 2018. As Lee Anderton explains in his walkthrough video, "We never felt that [the ML2] was our own thing. It was always very similar looking to a Les Paul or an ESP Eclipse, and the world is full of guitars trying to look like a Les Paul.

"We went to Dave, who's the Chapman designer and said 'We need a single cut with two humbuckers on it, but can it just be more our... vibe?'. That's one of the hardest things to do in the world, make a guitar that is a nod to something but not a copy of something, and then not make it look hideous."

We'd say they just about managed it. Starting with the sleek trans satin finishes over a classy flame maple veneer (in turn covering a carved maple top and mahogany body core), the ML2 Pro comes in Azure Blue or River Styx Black, but it's more than just a pretty face. The through-body neck is roasted maple to keep things stable, and it's carved to an everybody's-happy C-shape profile.

New contours at the body end mean that accessed is made easy and there's a new outline to the headstock to boot It's faced with a macassar ebony fretboard, which offers a drop-tune-friendly 25.5-inch scale length and 24 stainless steel frets. The whole lot is left pristine bar the Chapman logo inlayed at the 12th fret (there's glow-in-the-dark side dots to help you navigate).

The pickups come from Seymour Duncan with heavy-oriented Sentient in the neck position and Pegasus in the bridge. These are wired to a simple three-way switch/volume/volume/tone control layout, with the tone pot offering a master coil split for both pickups via a push/pull pot.

Finally, the guitar is completed with a Chapman String Through hardtail bridge, Chapman strap buttons and Hipshot Grip Lock locking tuners, adding up to a lot of guitar for £999.

Stuart Williams

PEDALS

HARLEY BENTON DOUBLE PEDALS

Harley Benton doesn't hang around when it comes to new products, and its most recent is the Double Pedal series – a collection of six pedals which all serve as two pedals in one. There's the Evil Twin (analogue overdrive and Tubedrive), Duality (reverb and delay), Double Vision (analogue tremolo and chorus), Twoface (analogue overdrive and tremolo), Sugar & Spice (digital reverb and delay/chorus), and Double Jammer (drum machine and looper). They feature a full set of controls for each effect, plus the ability to switch the effect order (apart from the Double Jammer), and prices start at £67.

PEDAL

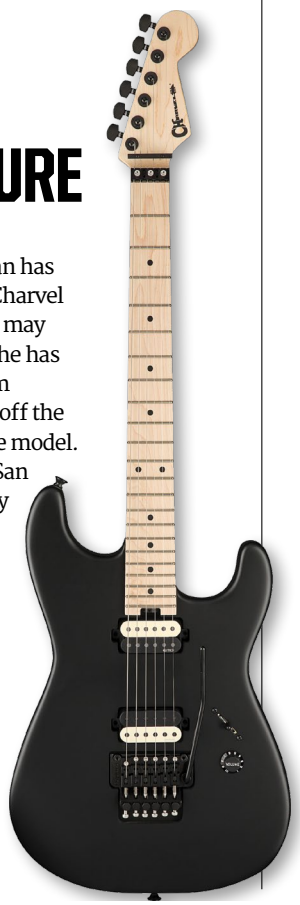
GREAT EASTERN EFFECTS DESIGN-A-DRIVE

You may not be familiar with Great Eastern Effects just yet, given that the UK pedal brand only launched last year. But with its second release (following its Champ-in-a-box Small Speaker Overdrive), GEE is turning its attention to our overdrive/amp compatibility. The Design-A-Drive has gain and output controls, but the tone section is where the detail lies. Thanks to its Edge (high frequency) and six-position Width (midrange) controls, it's possible to tailor your overdrive sound to create the perfect interaction between your pickups, pedal and amp – no more leaving the combinations to chance. The Design-A-Drive is available now, priced at £229. See www.greateasternfx.com for more info.

GUITAR

CHARVEL JIM ROOT SIGNATURE

Given that the Slipknot man has been spotted wielding a Charvel on-and-off since 2021, it may come as no surprise that he has now officially made the jump from Fender to its sister brand, kicking off the arrangement with a new signature model. The Jim Root Signature Pro-Mod San Dimas Style 1 features a mahogany body, graphite-reinforced maple neck with 22 jumbo frets and either maple or ebony fingerboards (both 12"-16" compound radius). The pickups come courtesy of Jim's signature EMG Daemonum, hooked up to a three-way blade switch and single volume control. Plus there's a Floyd Rose 1500 Series vibrato. These should be available shortly in Satin White or Satin Black, priced at £1,539.



Words Stuart Williams **Photography** Phil Barker

STOMP! HAMMERTIME!

Fender's low-cost stompers are here, and there's enough for every kind of player

Fender's Hammertone pedals see the brand jumping into the affordable effects market with both feet, offering a complete pedalboard's worth of stompboxes.

Covering everything from gain (Overdrive, Distortion, Metal and Fuzz), modulation (Chorus and Flanger) and ambience (Reverb, Delay and Space Delay), the pedals feature a simple control layout and bare-bones-yet-rugged hammered-finished enclosures.

The simplicity is met with some nice touches too, such as the custom colour F-logo knobs (coded by each pedal), uniform, top-mounted jacks and either additional internal controls on the four-knob drive/distortions, or panel-mounted toggle switches on the three-control modulation and ambience effects for even more tonal variation.

They're available now, with prices starting at £69 for the gain effects, and the rest coming in at £85.

UP CLOSE

Nine pedals

The Hammertone range comprises nine effects covering the major types for your 'board.

Simple designs

There's no fiddly menus, just hands-on control plus set-and-forget internal tailoring for the four-control pedals.

Custom control colours

We love the stripped-back styling, along with the colour-coded F-logo control knobs.

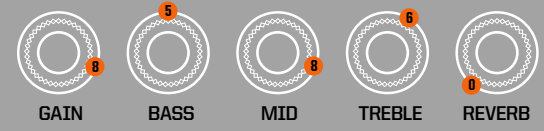
HOW TO

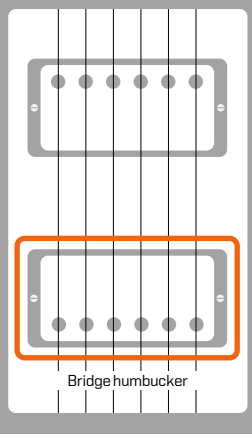
WHAT YOU WILL LEARN
- ✔ Triplet feel
- ✔ Alternate picking
- ✔ Drop C tuning

RIFF OF THE MONTH

GET THE SOUND

CHANNEL DISTORTION





Mark plays his signature Jackson Dominion and Willie an ESP Eclipse, both through a variety of Mesa Boogie amps. Although the tone is high gain, the low end is very tight and the mids are very present, giving the notes a precise and quick attack that punches through the mix. You'll need to tune to drop C (CGCFAD from low to high). If you usually keep your guitar in standard tuning you'll either need to use a set of strings that are a couple of gauges heavier than your usual set or, alternatively, practise the riff in drop D (DADGBE).

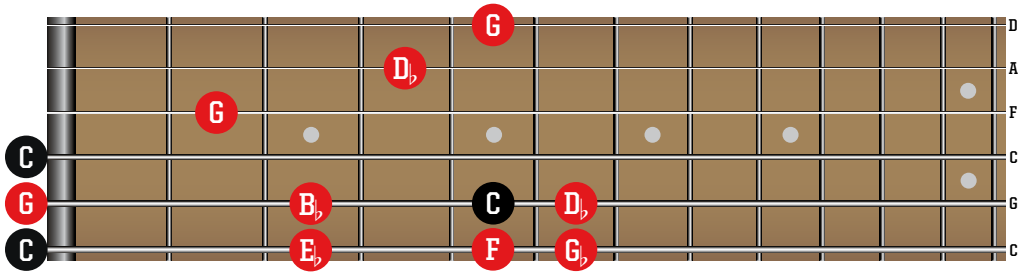
LAMB OF GOD

Nevermore

Here in the lead single from their latest album, *Omens*, guitarists Mark Morton and Willie Adler return with their trademark tight, articulate riffing style – *Nevermore* combines a heavy blues sound with the darker mood of the Phrygian mode. The riff has a triplet feel which adds to the heaviness of the groove. The bulk of the riff takes place on the open sixth string and at the 3rd, 5th and 6th frets – the first four notes of the blues scale. Throughout the riff these intervals are played both as single notes and as barred powerchords. In addition, a G tritone stab is played on the highest three strings. The riff has a repeating four-bar structure but with two different endings. The first uses the 3rd and 5th frets on the fifth string, staying within the blues scale structure; the second incorporates a D♭ on the 6th fret, hinting at the darker sounding Phrygian mode. Be sure to follow our slowed-down performance in the video for a clearer idea of how the riff is played.

CHEAT SHEET

Appears at: 0: 59 to 1:29
Tempo: 120bpm
Key/scale: C blues / C Phrygian
Main techniques: Alternate picking, palm muting, one-finger powerchords



As the riff is played in drop C tuning, the notes fall differently on the guitar compared to standard tuning. The tonal centre of the riff is C and the majority of the riff leans on the root, ♭3rd, 4th and ♭5th intervals, giving it a blues scale sound. The tritone chord played on the higher strings introduces the D♭ note, a ♭2 interval which adds the darkness of the Phrygian mode.

Photo Getty

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FIRST STEPS IN GUITAR...

DOOM METAL RIFFS

The plodding crunch of early Sabbath is the ideal place to hone your powerchord chops

Because most styles of music use the same core techniques, once you can play a bit of guitar, you can try out a bunch of genres without needing to learn more skills. Jenna is showing Paul new ways to apply what he's learned so far. After last month's funk primer they're looking at metal, because metal is awesome.

Every metal sub-genre can be traced to Black Sabbath, but doom metal is the most openly Sabbath-inspired. Its hallmarks are slow tempos, dissonant intervals, and huge sustaining powerchords. Its plodding speed is great for beginners, but also poses a challenge for players at any level, as nailing the timing at such low tempos is a real test.

TEACHER

JENNA SCARAMANGA
Jenna has taught guitar for 15 years at music colleges, schools, and IGF summer camps. She studied with Guthrie Govan at BIMM, and was classic rock columnist for TG's sister magazine *Guitar Techniques*.

STUDENT

PAUL ELLIOTT
Paul has written about music since 1985 for various titles including *Sounds*, *Kerrang!*, *Q*, *MOJO* and *Classic Rock*. Among the many guitarists he has interviewed are Slash, Angus Young, Keith Richards and Jimmy Page.

JENNA SAYS...

The way Paul grinned the first time he played a powerchord, I knew we had to do some metal riffs! I had fun recording the audio example, trying to make all the chord shifts clean and to hit the notes hard without accidentally playing open strings. Even now I still feel I could play it better! Hopefully that means Paul will never get tired of practising this stuff.

The hardest part for Paul has been developing the stretch between first and third fingers to play powerchords. Descending powerchord riffs work well for this because the frets get wider as you move down. Find a fret position where the shape feels comfortable, then move down one at a time. Stop when it gets uncomfortable. If you do that every day, you'll find your finger stretch increases quite quickly.

Words Jenna Scaramanga, Paul Elliott **Guitars and backing** Jenna Scaramanga **Photos** Olly Curtis

FULL TRACK + BACKING (BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO)
This song comes with a full demo track and backing track. Enter the above link into your web browser of choice; press play and jam along,

TECHNIQUE CHECK...

Get your fingers in the right place and your powerchords will rock!

1 POWERCHORD HAND POSITION
Push your wrist slightly forward so that your hands and fingers are quite straight.

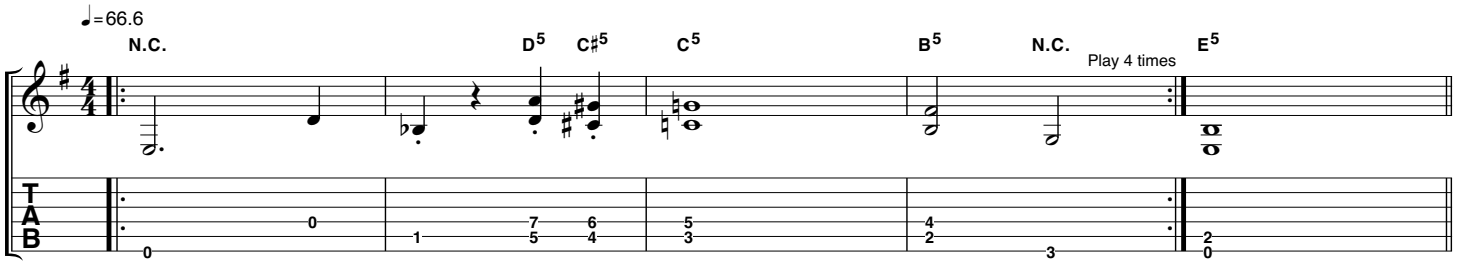
2 POWERCHORD THUMB POSITION
Thumb low and pointing up allows the biggest stretch. If your guitar neck has a skunk stripe, line up with that.

3 POWERCHORDS DOWN THE NECK
Start high up and move down the neck one fret at a time to gradually develop your finger stretch.

4 STACCATO
Drop the heel of your picking hand onto the strings between chord stabs to keep them tight and choppy.

DOOM METAL RIFF

BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO



It's actually easier to play this faster: the slow tempo shows up any imperfections in your timing. Picking open strings cleanly is also tough – sometimes they feel a bit lively and the other strings can ring out in sympathy, giving a loose, mushy sound. Beat this by resting your fretting fingers against idle strings to help keep them quiet.

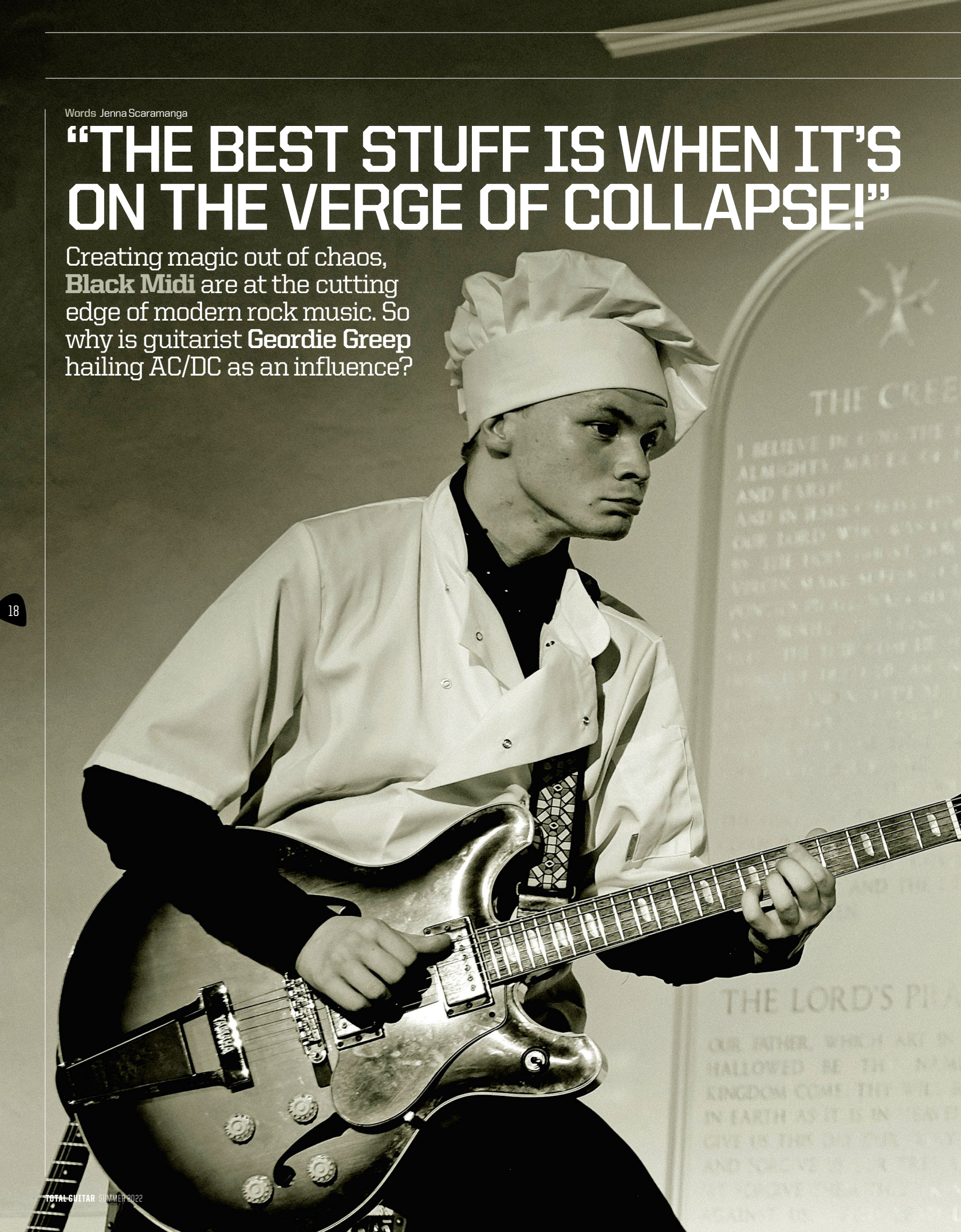
PAUL SAYS...

Heavy metal is the music closest to my heart, so it's exciting to begin to get to grips with powerchords. It's also very challenging for a novice player who finds it difficult to manage that stretch between fingers on the fretting hand. One of the main issues for me is maintaining the correct thumb position so that the stretch is more easily reached. But hitting a powerchord correctly is an amazing feeling – especially when mixed in with a Black Sabbath style tritone chord, which Jenna also showed me. I once held Tony Iommi's guitar during a Black Sabbath photo session backstage at Meadowlands arena in New Jersey. This memory is all the inspiration I need to keep practising.

Words Jenna Scaramanga

"THE BEST STUFF IS WHEN IT'S ON THE VERGE OF COLLAPSE!"

Creating magic out of chaos, **Black Midi** are at the cutting edge of modern rock music. So why is guitarist **Geordie Greep** hailing AC/DC as an influence?



What can an experimental rock band learn from AC/DC? "The biggest breakthrough was in terms of amplifiers," grins Black Midi guitarist/vocalist Geordie Greep. While his post-punk peers wonder how to fit their vast pedalboards into the tour van, the Greep (as he is known to his friends) has rediscovered the joy of plugging straight into the amp. And it all started when Geordie decided to channel Angus Young in Black Midi's live set – playing the intro to *Riff Raff*, the frenetic opening track to AC/DC's legendary 70s live album *If You Want Blood You've Got It*.

"There's not many better guitar sounds than Angus's on *If You Want Blood*," Geordie says. "I was like, 'Forget the pedals, let's just start turning the amp up to 10 and using the volume control on the guitar!' After that we were like, 'Wow, this is way better. This is the way to do it!'"

This discovery happened as Black Midi began recording their third album *Hellfire*. Geordie was using the rig he'd had since 2021 album *Cavalcade*: an Orange TH-30 run clean with pedals. That was until his fellow AC/DC fan Max 'Sizzle' Goulding, Black Midi's co-producer, spotted a Marshall JMP head in the studio. Geordie was uncertain. The studio's engineer said it wasn't the best amp.

"Sizzle was like, 'Look, we're definitely using it!'" Geordie laughs. "So we got it set up with a 4x12 and just turned it up to 10 and went straight in. It sounded way better than any amp I've ever heard." And that is how Black Midi became unlikely 21st century champions of the cranked vintage Marshall.

The AC/DC influence is not immediately apparent on *Hellfire*. The new album continues where *Cavalcade* left off – a daring romp through every genre they can think of. It's as though they've just discovered all the music in the world, and they love it all too much to leave any unplayed. Perhaps surprisingly, it works, held together by their sense of humour and outstanding musicianship.

Geordie's songs often begin as pastiches. "Trying to come up with a pastiche of a waltz, a show tune, a South American song, a blues or a funk track, you throw yourself into this thing where

it's just fun," he says. "Along the way you think 'What if you put in this chord which they never use, or you suddenly went into this rhythm which they don't usually do?' It's just ways of taking things we know but altering them slightly. Not for the sake of it, but to make something that's interesting and hasn't exactly been heard before."

Hellfire is packed with stuff we've never heard before, but Geordie highlights two tracks. *Sugar/Tzu* has a breakneck chromatic riff: "That fusion riff is really fun to play. It got steadily faster as we played it more, so now it's at a stupid speed." His other favourite, *Dangerous Liaisons*, is inspired by Brazilian guitarists. "It's not something you necessarily think straight away, but it has a lot of Latin chord voicings and syncopation."

Geordie rarely writes music to be deliberately jarring, but he is keen to avoid predictability. "I think [jazz guitarist] John Scofield said as soon as you play something that's a lick or a physical pattern rather than a musical one or a melody, then you failed. If it's not as pure as imagining it and seeing it in the moment, it's not music. That's his view. I think there's truth in that."

Although they're frequently joined by piano and horn players that can swell their numbers to as many as eight, Black Midi are actually a trio. Greep, drummer Morgan Simpson, and bassist Cameron Picton write their songs individually, sharing demos with each other. "Then," Geordie explains, "when we come together we work out what arrangement-wise is the best option for the group. We're taking leads from those demos but often also putting in new touches. We each play quite a lot of instruments so even the demos are usually already quite multi-layered and symphonic or whatever and then we come together and see what we can replicate and what we can add."

Black Midi are one of a handful of cutting edge acts that are still thoroughly guitar-based, and Geordie admits the guitar has limitations. "One thing that's challenging about the guitar is the fact that you don't choose what inversions you're playing. On the piano you have exact control over what notes to play. The melody can always come first because you can see it there and fit the chords around it. With the guitar you end up relying a little bit more on physical patterns and shapes. It's much easier to get trapped into just playing the same things. You are quite inhibited with what you can play."

To get around this problem, Geordie often starts from the melody. "I create chords from scratch around that. I'm not pretending I'm inventing chords or anything, but I'm not necessarily sure what that chord is called. I sometimes use passing chords for almost every quaver rather than fitting the melody around stock chords. Just tailor the chords to the melody rather than the other way around. I think that's a much more musical way of working."

If using a different chord for each melody note reminds you of J.S. Bach, that isn't entirely coincidental. "I think the most perfect piece of music is probably Bach's Mass in B Minor," Geordie says. "I never had a classical education, but I think the idea of melody coming first and fitting everything around that is what's so compelling about that music. Every part in the score is as complete as the full score. Every line has independence. Every time you listen to it there's something else you can listen to. I don't think anyone's music will reach those heights in the next hundred years, but it's a good guided light to aspire to."

"FORGET THE PEDALS – LET'S JUST TURN THE AMP UP TO 10!"

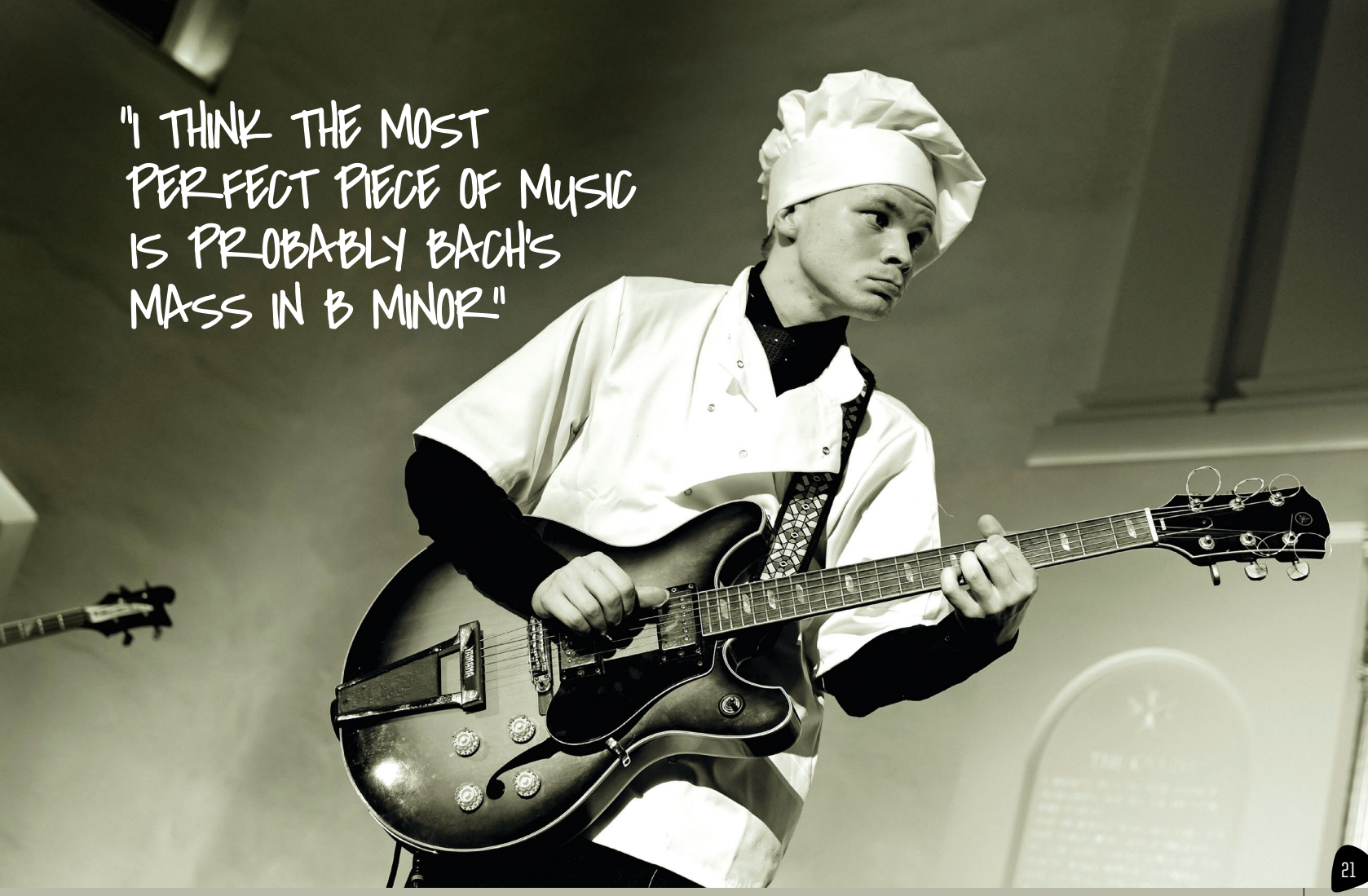
CHECKS APPEAL Black Midi bassist Cameron Picton (below).

Black Midi have the distinction of sounding genuinely unlike anyone else, and Greep's process for creating is surprisingly grounded. "The main philosophy really is instead of relying on divine inspiration or whatever, to instead just work hard and keep working every day. That's the only way that you can reliably come up with good things – just doing it every day without fail." He admits there are days where he struggles to write. "But if you do it every day, the instances of that are less and less and the instances of inspiration seeming to come from nowhere happen more and more frequently. I always think if a boxer is asking 'How do I get better at boxing?' you don't say 'Wait for inspiration,' you say 'Go to the gym.'"

In the studio, Black Midi don't waste any time. "We usually do just one or two rehearsals and then go straight to recording," he says. "We don't like spending too much time getting the songs so tight that we can play them asleep. We like to retain a little bit of tension for a recording studio, because oftentimes the best stuff is when it's on the verge of collapse." They record live as much as possible, but for *Hellfire* they found some songs had to be multitracked. "There were a few songs where we thought it was important it stays that specific tempo. There's a few times where we have recorded stuff live and then you listen to it back and it's just way too fast. I don't think those tracks recorded with a click particularly suffered from that, but the stuff that needed to be live was recorded live."

This minimal-preparation approach combined with live takes does result in some mistakes slipping into the final product, but Black Midi embrace those moments. As Geordie puts it: "A lot of the time that's the magic of it, where it's kind of idiosyncratic, of the moment unexpected slight permutations in what you were going for but have their own sort of more spontaneous character. It's always something that can't be faked."

The main guitar on the record is a late 70s Yamaha SA-60. "It's basically like a 335 with squared off cutaways," he explains. "It just feels wonderful and the pickups are really quite bright for a semi-acoustic. Like a lot of that period of Japanese guitars, the neck is just wonderful. The action is incredibly



"I THINK THE MOST PERFECT PIECE OF MUSIC IS PROBABLY BACH'S MASS IN B MINOR"

low for a really old guitar but it's an easy guitar to play. I always like having quite a big body on the guitar because you can feel the vibrations of the notes.

"A lot of the time I'll be in the middle position between each humbucker. I don't really mess with the tone controls. Playing on your own, doing that stuff that sounds great. As soon as you listen to it in the control room it's like 'Where's the guitar gone?' You can't even hear it anymore."

The SA-60 was joined by Greep's Mexican Stratocaster and a Gibson SG Faded, but he wasn't satisfied with either. "The Strat feels really nice to play but it doesn't sound that great," he says, "and the pickups are actually great in the SG but it never stays in tune." Since recording, he has upgraded these to a 60th Anniversary Stratocaster and a custom shop SG Les Paul. A previous owner added a Seymour Duncan humbucker (unknown model) to the Strat, which Geordie prefers: "The standard Strat pickup is great for a lot of things but for what we're doing I always find it a bit too piercing and brittle."

Now that Geordie has discovered the joys of a loud Marshall, he is not going back. "For the last tour, our manager has an old Marshall Plexi amp and we had that into a 4x12. When we can't get hold of that now what we do is have the Orange TH-30 going straight into a 4x12. That's not quite as good but it's 95% there. It's odd how much difference just the speaker cabinet makes."

Inevitably, this means Black Midi gigs are loud affairs, but Geordie is adamant it's not his fault. "Morgan, the drummer, plays so loud everyone needs to be that loud to be heard! The Plexi's not even as loud as the Orange. I used to have the Orange at about two or three maybe, but even that was full volume. It would just be more distorted if you turned it up."

And then Geordie commits post-punk heresy. "The thing with the new Marshall setup that's really good is I'm not using any pedals anymore!" he declares. "All I have is a volume pedal and an EQ, which I use as an overdrive palate. I always have my foot on the volume pedal and control the gain that way. It's much more rewarding. You feel like you're driving a sports car or something! Every little movement you get a bit more or a bit less of the growl of the amp. It's not on-off – not like 'here's distortion, here's no distortion' – but every bit of the song you can change it slightly to get a little more or a little less. It's just been excellent."

MASTER CHEF
Geordie Greep above and below right with Morgan Simpson (left) and Cameron Picton (centre).

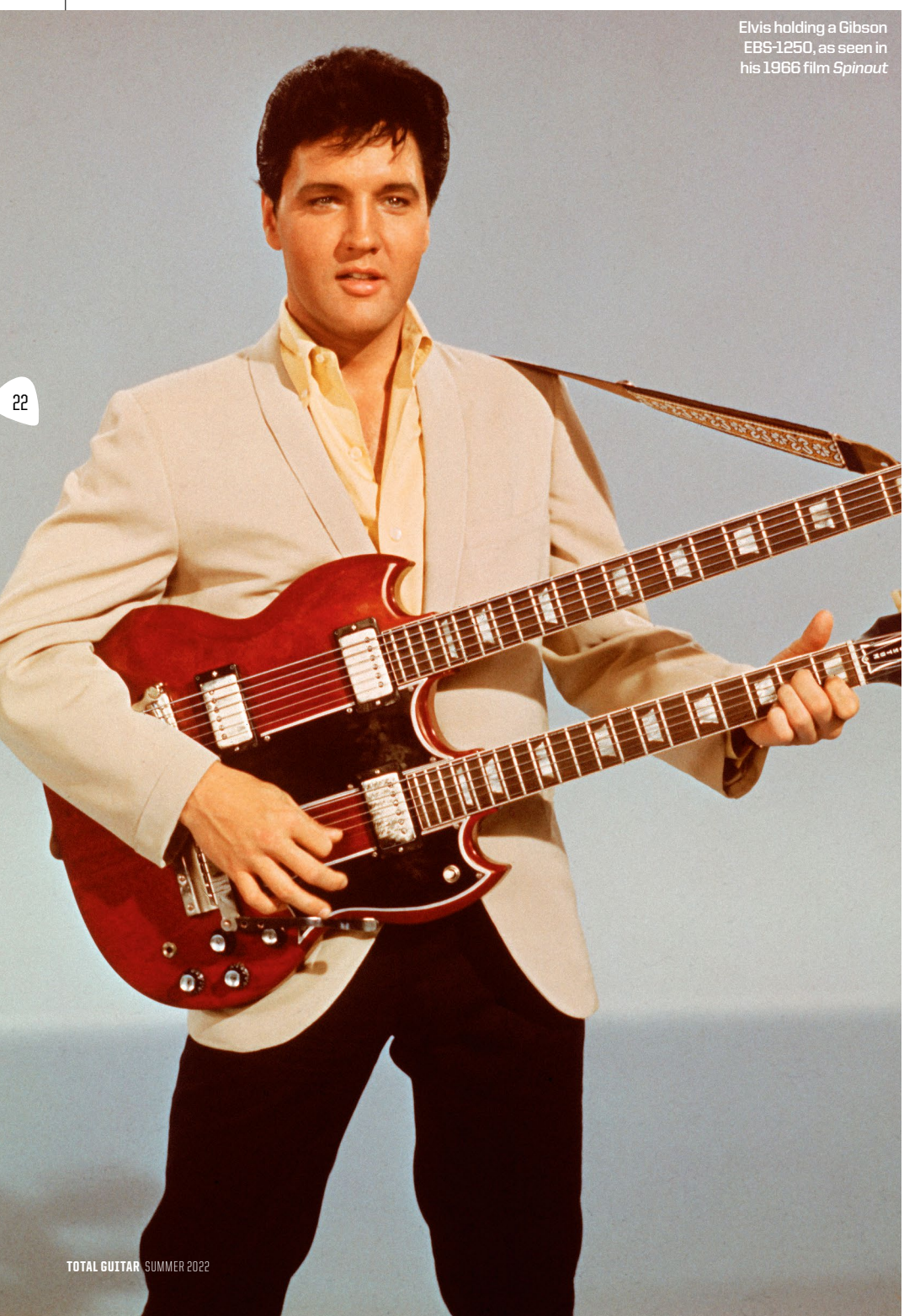
The EQ is an 80s Boss GE-7B Bass Equaliser, made in Japan, which Geordie uses to boost the amp. Divulging a trade secret, he reveals "I often turn up one of the lower bands to full and one of the high bands to full and then you get like a total Frank Zappa-like a wah sound."

For all Black Midi's experimentalism, Geordie has solidly traditional advice on what makes a song great: "Whatever kind of music you're making, it's the melodies and the chords that shine through. Sonics can be a hook, but any music you truly love is going to be because of those elements."

Words Neville Marten

"THAT SWINGIN' LITTLE GUITAR MAN!"

As a new biopic celebrates the life of the King of Rock 'N' Roll, TG presents 10 key tracks in which **Elvis Presley** and his killer guitarists rocked the world...



Elvis holding a Gibson EBS-1250, as seen in his 1966 film *Spinout*

HOUND DOG (1956)

Elvis's treatment of *Hound Dog* is very unlike the 1952 original by Big Mama Thornton, written for her by Jerry Lieber and Mike Stoller. The lyrics were altered to reflect Elvis's gender and to clean up the original's sexual innuendo. Elvis chose 'take 28' of the 31 attempts, but by this time his trusted guitarist Scotty Moore was getting frustrated, so on his second solo – the first is a brilliant spontaneous outing – made a few weird percussive noises and knocked out a couple of random licks. Keith Richards said it sounded like Scotty had thrown the guitar on the floor, picked it up and got the perfect sound.

TOO MUCH (1956)

This track contains one of Scotty Moore's most outlandish solos. We'll let Scotty explain, as he did to *Guitarist* magazine in 1992. "There's a boy on this tour we just finished, plays every note I ever played – even the bad ones," he jokes. "*Too Much* was in an unusual key for us at the time. It was in A♭, and we'd done two or three takes, but on this particular cut I just got absolutely bonkers, just got lost, but somehow I came out of it and that's the one Elvis picked. But anyway, this young guitarist would play that sucker note for note!"

LOVE ME TENDER (1956)

The song was written by Ken Darby and George Poulton for the movie of the same name, but producer David Weisbart did not want Presley's usual band on the recording and insisted that Ken Darby's trio, with Vito Mumolo on guitar, did it. A simple nylon-string guitar part using spread chords interspersed with bass notes, *Love Me Tender* is in D, but for the bridge chords of D, F#m, Bm, D7, G, Gm, D, Mumolo plays D, F#7/C#, Bm, D/A, G, Gm, D, providing a partial chromatic rundown in the bass. It's a simple but effective arrangement trick.

KING CREOLE (1958)

This was the title track to Presley's fourth film, for which he garnered critical praise for his performance of cajun guitarist Danny Fisher. The song itself is a hot-tempo 12-bar blues in B, with Elvis and his band augmented by harmony vocals from the Jordanaires. Scotty Moore powers the track from top to tail, with a driving riff played on his Gibson Super 400. The inevitable guitar solo is an explosion of tremolo-picked B notes high on the top string, cascading into tasty blues scale licks, string bends and doublestops. It's one of Scotty's most exciting lead breaks ever.

GUITAR MAN (1967)

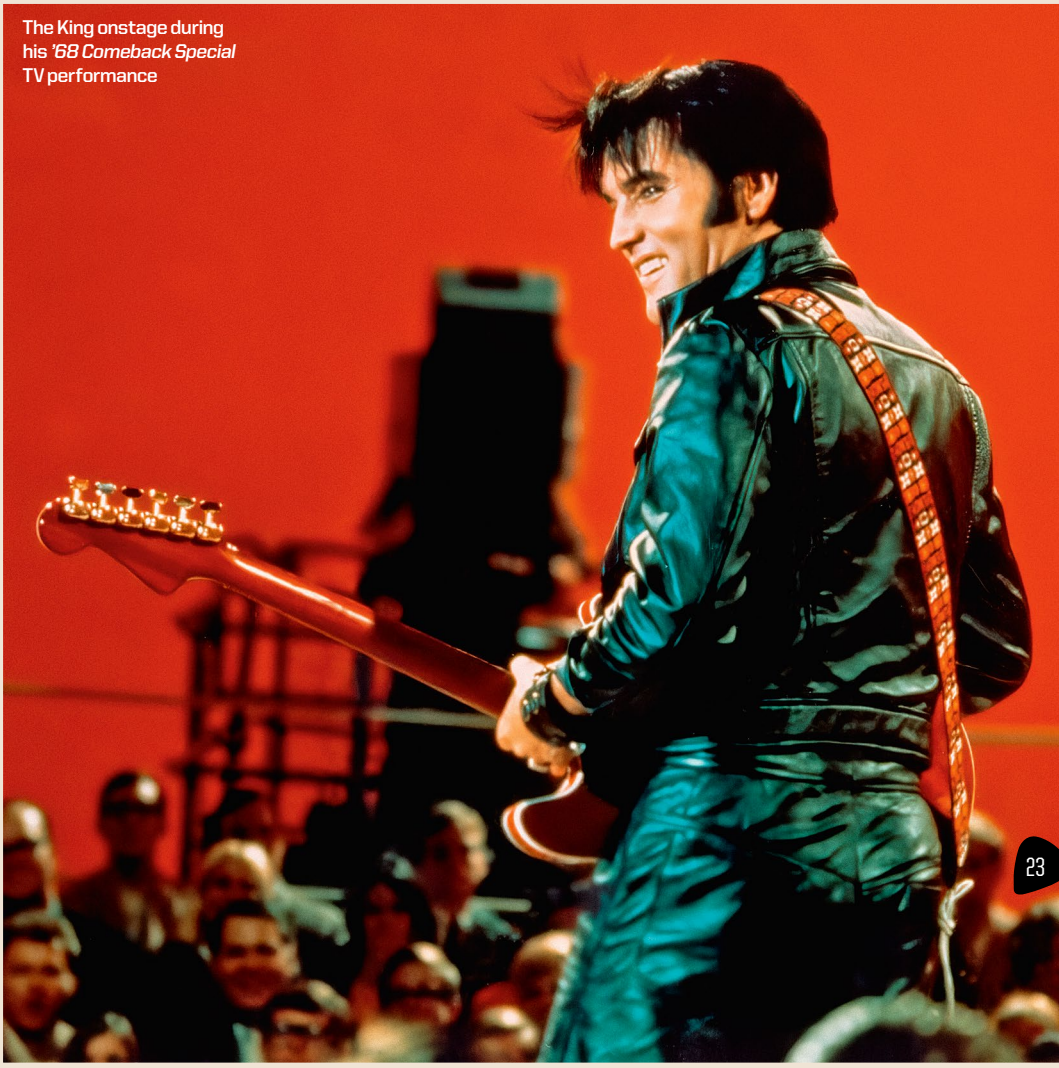
This superb song was written and originally recorded by country guitar phenomenon Jerry Reed. Reed used the classic pick and fingers technique pioneered by Merle Travis and dubbed 'Travis picking', and even though Reed used nylon-string on both his and Presley's first recording of *Guitar Man*, it gives the track both movement and excitement. Presley had tried to record the song before, but was unhappy with the feel so demanded that they get "that red-neck picker who played on the original tune." Jerry obliged, nailing it in just a few takes.

ALWAYS ON MY MIND (1972)

There are great versions of this song by 'Little Miss Dynamite' Brenda Lee, country megastar Willie Nelson, and British synth-pop duo Pet Shop Boys. Yet somehow Elvis made it his own. By this time he was using his Las Vegas live band for studio sessions, including guitarist James Burton. Burton had made his name with Ricky Nelson, and his solos on tracks such as *Hello Mary Lou* are legendary. There's not much lead work here, but what there is perfect – just plaintive string bends and a perfect solo that apes the song's melody. Could it have inspired Clapton's playing on *Wonderful Tonight*?

BURNING LOVE (1972)

Still depressed after his failed marriage to Priscilla, Elvis only seemed interested in singing ballads, but *Burning Love* seemed an obvious hit to all around him, and Presley finally caved in. Six takes and it was done! The electric guitar is attributed to James Burton, but the heavily effected solo and fills are not typical JB (there's whammy bar here and James played a Tele). But it's a great example of rhythm guitar used as lead instrument so was it in fact Elvis's rhythm guitarist, John Wilkinson, with James playing the verses' chord stabs? It remains a mystery. But this was Elvis's final hit before his death in 1977.



The King onstage during his *'68 Comeback Special* TV performance

"ON THIS PARTICULAR CUT I JUST GOT ABSOLUTELY BONKERS!"

SCOTTY MOORE

Scotty Moore with his Gibson L-5

Photograph Getty

Words Neville Marten, Jamie Hunt

RIFF LESSONS

Seven down, three to go! Let's get rocking 'n' rolling with a trio of classic riffs from the King's greatest songs. Our in-depth video lessons tell you all you need to know...

Find your videos online at bit.ly/tg361audio

MYSTERY TRAIN (1955)

Appears at: 0:00–0:34
Tempo: 238 bpm
Key/scale: E major
Main techniques: Travis picking, simultaneous bass, chords and melody

Often cited as the first real rhythm and blues song to be recorded by a white artist, *Mystery Train* was written by bluesman Junior Parker, but the Presley version is almost twice as fast as Parker's original. Propelled by just Elvis on vocals and his 'Sun Sessions' Martin D-18, with Bill Black on bass and Scotty Moore on electric rhythm and lead, it was a straight live take. Piling on slapback echo, Scotty played the riff – E and A/E, with alternate E octave notes using pick and fingers; cracked out a solo featuring string bends, chord tones and fragments, and more or less invented rockabilly right there. Our video lesson takes you through Moore's intro and verse lines, which, although comprising a lengthy section of the song, boils down to just four chords (E, A/E, A7 and B7) and some repeating picking patterns. Learn the chord shapes first, then slowly experiment with picking out the notes.

TG Tip: For a smooth change when changing from the E chord to the A/E, use your third finger to barre across the 2nd fret and hold all three notes of the open A major.

JAILHOUSE ROCK (1956)

Appears at: 0:00–0:30
Tempo: 165 bpm
Key/scale: E major (TG lesson) / E♭ major (original recording)
Main techniques: Sliding chords, alternate picking, palm muting

This song is ultra-cool for several reasons. First is Elvis Presley's stunning dance routine in the film, wearing a jailbird's striped T-shirt. Second is the 'stops' and anticipatory drums between Elvis's spat-out verses. Then there was the key. The song is in E♭, and Scotty Moore plays the typical 'walking arpeggio' riffs, but when it comes to the low E♭ note (an E in standard tuning), he plays the open sixth string. Scotty did sometimes tune down (as he did on *Don't Be Cruel*), so who knows? Anyway, our video lesson is in E, to save you the hassle of tuning down! We'll cover the D♯ to E major intro chords and the walking bassline from the chorus. It's a simple one-bar lick – you just have to transpose it note for note through the A, E, B, A, E progression.

TG Tip: Navigate the tricky move to the implied B chord in the chorus by sliding up to the 6th fret with your third finger.

SUSPICIOUS MINDS (1969)

Appears at: 0:00–0:38
Tempo: 112 bpm
Key/scale: G
Main techniques: Barre chords, hybrid picking, hammer-ons

With Elvis delivering an impassioned vocal fuelled by his recent split from wife Priscilla, *Suspicious Minds* was recorded during the same Memphis sessions that yielded another classic, *In The Ghetto* – and both tracks featured Reggie Young on guitar. The whole of *Suspicious Minds* hangs on Reggie's super tight fingerstyle playing (on a Gibson Super 400, we think), performed with impeccable timing and squeaky clean tone. Though the phrasing is similar to *In The Ghetto* (which uses an open A shape), here you'll be following a 3rd-fret G barre chord and a C/E on the adjacent strings, before moving the riff up the fretboard to the 8th and 10th frets. We'll give you the finer details in the video lesson. Suffice to say, if you can manage the opening bar of music the rest should feel familiar and, dare we say, fairly easy!

TG Tip: Avoid finger fatigue and try not to play a full barre on the opening G chord – you only need to pick the four bass strings here.

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Words Amit Sharma **Photos** Alex Lake

"I LOVE THE IDEA OF PLAYING JUST ONE NOTE AND BREAKING SOMEONE'S HEART"

Porcupine Tree's comeback album is a progressive rock masterclass, but leader **Steven Wilson** is no virtuoso on guitar. "Less," he says, "is more..."

After playing the biggest gig of their career, most bands would carry the momentum forward and set their sights on challenges new. Porcupine Tree, however, are not like most bands. After headlining at the Royal Albert Hall in October 2010, their leader Steven Wilson, guitarist and vocalist, decided it was time for the group to take a break.

12 years on, with Wilson having built a successful solo career that has commercially outperformed the progressive rock band that first got him noticed, he has reunited Porcupine Tree as a trio, with drummer Gavin Harrison and keyboard player Richard Barbieri. Their new album, playfully titled *Closure/Continuation*, revisits some of the avant-garde brilliance that built them a cult following, while also treading new atmospheric ground.

Wilson is now widely regarded as the most prominent and prolific figure in modern progressive music. And yet, for all the complexity and odd-time riffs in Porcupine Tree's music, he has a simple approach to guitar. "I don't have the technique," he admits. "But then again, I don't really want to play fast anyway."

Let's start with why Porcupine Tree split up in 2010...

I felt like we'd achieved everything we could achieve within the confines of this musical vocabulary and style we had spent years creating and developing. We got to [2009 album] *The Incident* and I think for the first time it felt like we were no longer progressing or taking that sound forward. It was that dreaded expression: 'more of the same'. For me, that was a massive red flag. So we went off in our own ways.

But it only took a couple of years for you to haphazardly start working on new music together?

Yeah. In 2012, Gavin and I started meeting up for a coffee. I just picked up a bass guitar sitting in the corner of the studio and we started to write grooves and polyrhythms. And that is the bedrock of this new album. When you hear the opening track *Harridan*, which has this five-count bass and drum groove, that was one of the early things that came out of those jams. Other ideas were thrown on top, but a lot of it was written on bass and drums. In the meantime, Gavin was busy playing with King Crimson, I was busy with solo records and Richard was too. So for us it was a question of 'when' rather than 'if', although if you told me in 2012 if it would be another ten years, I would have been surprised by that. As it turns out, it's been a very slow process. Without the lockdown we probably wouldn't have finished it, because the time off from various tours being cancelled gave us an opportunity to knuckle down.

How do you see your solo career and Porcupine Tree co-existing?
"I guess the reason why the timing feels perfect right now is because my solo music has diverted a long way away from the Porcupine Tree sound. And there have been moments in the last ten years where that wasn't the case. [2015 album] *Hand. Cannot. Erase.* was quite close musically, I think. Some fans even felt it could have been a new Porcupine Tree record. In recent years, however, my solo music has come a long way from that.

On the band's new album, the opening riff to *Rats Return* feels like one of the heaviest things you've ever written, especially with the Opeth-style tritone stabs.
What's interesting about that riff is that it's almost the answer to an equation Gavin set me. The rhythm came before the riff. Gavin came up with the pattern with all those stabs and I had to sit there and figure out what I could do to that. It was like finding the answer to a mathematical problem! That's one of the beautiful things about how this album developed. It was very collaborative. Gavin never sets you an easy task. *Harridan* is in five, *Herd Culling* is in 11 and *Rats Return* is another odd-time one. When he played it to me, I thought, 'What an interesting rhythm… but what the f*ck is it?!' The riff came out of that. It never would have existed without Gavin's rhythm. I've always liked dark riffs and evil tritone things, especially given how I grew up listening to King Crimson and Black Sabbath. Those discords have always appealed to me, there's something beautiful about an ugly chord, so here we are! Someone told me the other day that they loved the fact we'd gone back to drop-D riffs and I said, 'No, it's in regular E!' There's not much gain on that riff, it's actually quite clean. And it's my Telecaster doing that, they can make things sound gnarly and heavy without needing to put a lot of drive on. So the tone isn't really a metal tone at all.

The major 3rd and flat 7th gives it a Phrygian Dominant feel, which is probably where that metallic flavour comes from.
I don't know much music theory, so I pretend I don't give a sh*t about it! But I guess I do, deep down. This one came out of my love for discordant metal riffs, and it's worth remembering Magma and Mahavishnu Orchestra were exploring those harmonies in the early 70s. Then you had Swans in the 80s. I've always loved that sound. You can go back to 20th century classical music and hear it in the music of Scelsi, Xenakis or Stockhausen. I like those ugly harmonies and tritones.

***Of The New Day* carries some major 7th chords that feel far from happy…**
Right. Major sevens are among the friendliest chords out there – they tend to sound very nice and conjure up summer days – but there's actually a way to make them sound really evil! So I might take a minor idea and throw them in. For the riff in *Of The New Day*, I'm changing from a straight A power chord on the fifth fret to a B♭maj7 by fretting the sixth fret on the sixth string, the fifth fret on the fifth and the seventh fret on the fourth. And I do a similar thing near the end of that snakey riff in Harridan, using that exact same chord on the fourth, third and second frets. You can make a major seven sound really evil depending on how you use it and I love that – taking something happy to the dark side.

What advice can you offer those hoping to come up with their own odd-time riffs?
Work with an interesting drummer, it's as simple as that. Gavin will never give me a straight rhythm. Woe betide he ever works in 4/4! So you'll get something that will make you think and stretch you. *Herd Culling* was the last song written for the record. I felt like we needed one more so I asked him to send over some patterns, and they were in 11. Again, it was like a mathematical equation. What riff would work well here? Working with an interesting drummer will force you to come up with polyrhythmic and odd-time guitar parts. Gavin's the king of unusual rhythms that can take a track in different directions. Richard tears his hair out because he's not naturally inclined to work that way. He's always saying, 'F*ck sake, can we not just work in 4 this time?' I'm in the middle. I love the simplicity of Richard's sound design. It's the non-musician approach of sculpting noise. And Gavin is the opposite, he's a total pro musician who wants to say complicated things that are easy on the ear. Of *The New Day* has fifty time changes in it and yet superficially it just sounds like a straight country ballad. So if you want to look below the surface, there is complexity there. If you don't, and just want to enjoy the music, it works on that level too. We're not hitting you on the head saying 'Listen to how clever we are!' And there's a lot of that around these days. Most people

TOTALLY WIRED
Steven Wilson during the recording of *Closure/Continuation*

"THERE'S SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL ABOUT AN UGLY CHORD"

Photo Neil Godwin

listen to *Money* by Pink Floyd and enjoy it as a great piece of pop without engaging with the fact it's in seven. *Pyramid Song* by Radiohead is another one – very complex rhythmically but most people don't need to look at it like that. It's just a beautiful song.

Your solo in *Dignity* is very understated and lyrical, in the style of David Gilmour.
I've always loved guitar players that can play one note and break your heart rather than the ones who play twenty notes that go in one ear and out the other. I would love to be able to play guitar like that just to have the technique, but I don't have the inclination. It's a bit like Picasso – he was an incredible technician and painter but chose to create in a primitive style. I love the idea of playing just one note and breaking someone's heart that way. Mikael [Åkerfeldt] from Opeth is one of my favourites in that regard. He has Fredrik [Åkesson] who plays all the clever stuff which is amazing, but it's Mikael's solos that really speak to me. He has that 'lonely Swede lost in a forest' quality!

Who else do you admire on that level?
You hear it in Peter Green's early work with Fleetwood Mac, you hear it in David Gilmour and bands like Talk Talk – there's a solo Mark Hollis played on the album *Laughing Stock* where it's just one note played for a minute! Literally nothing more, but it's so good. I also love Pete Shelley's solo on *Boredom* by Buzzcocks for similar reasons. Less is more, with me. I'm more into the feeling and sound, rather than all the notes.

You've been a Telecaster enthusiast since 2017's *To The Bone*. Given that some of these songs predate that album, are we hearing your PRS Goldtop on the album too?
Yeah! We started making this album before that love affair began, so a lot of the early sessions that we kept were done with my old Goldtop. But all the stuff that came later on was done with the Tele, which is what I'll be using live for the new songs. There's one part in *Harridan* where I switch to a baritone to play the low riff in B, but otherwise it will be mostly Tele. I've got an endorsement with Takamine so I use their acoustics a lot but on this record it was mainly my PRS Angelus. On *Chimera's Wreck* I was using my Ovation strung Nashville-style to get a very crystalline, musical box kind of tone.

There are some really interesting modulations on the album too – particularly in terms of tremolo and vibrato. What were you using?
The tremolo is the Moog MF Trem. I use vibrato a lot, and my favourite one is made by Diamond. And I've also got the Option 5 Rotary pedal, so those are my main modulation pedals. Then there's the two Strymons, the Timeline and the Big Sky. I have two Pogs on the 'board, one tuned an octave up and the other an octave down, which got used once or twice on the record. Purists will be horrified but I used the direct out on my little Hughes & Kettner Tubemeister 5 a lot! It sounds killer! All the sounds on *Herd Culling* were through that. And I used my Supro combo with a 57 on it for clean tones, like that lead on *Dignity*. I still have my Bad Cats too, of course, just for the heavier tones.

You certainly have a knack for using multiple effects in tandem to conjure up abstract noises.
That all comes from shoegaze music. Stuff like My Bloody Valentine and Slowdive, who have these impressionistic tones with a big cloud of echo and reverb, and then strum chords through them. The guitars become more of a texture, like a choral sort of sound. Robin Guthrie from Cocteau Twins would play just one note that would set off a whole chain of effects: delays, choruses, flangers and harmonisers. It's like the smallest physical gesture creating this heavenly cathedral of sound. I think the black metal guys totally got that too. It's the total opposite of the shredder thing, which can have a very clean and uninteresting tone to allow you to hear all the notes. I guess I'm more into abstract ideas where you can't hear all the notes!

GRANT
PALEONTOLOGY
BADLANDS / MONTANA

Words Amit Sharma Picures Ross Jennings

New Adventures In Prog!

Haken guitarist and TG writer **Charlie Griffiths** talks about his extraordinary new solo album and profiles four of modern prog's rising stars...

Charlie Griffiths' ventures as a guitar player have certainly been plentiful. First and foremost, he's known for his work alongside multi-instrumentalist Richard Henshall in English progressive metal band Haken, who formed in 2007 and have six studio albums, one EP and two live albums to their name thus far. In 2017, Charlie was recruited by ex-Dream Theater drummer Mike Portnoy for the Shattered Fortress supergroup, performing some of the finger-twisting and genre-defining progressive metal masterpieces from the drummer's original band. On top of his duties as a guitar magazine columnist and tutor, he's also released his solo debut *Tiktaalika*, which he describes as "the world's first palaeontology-based progressive metal album".

So what is it about the study of ancient life and heavy riffs?

"It was supposed to be a joke, but everyone started taking it seriously!" Charlie laughs. "It's only recently that I've realised that everything on this album is what I was into in the early 90s. I was at college studying geology and Dream Theater were emerging. You had albums like *Human* by Death and *Countdown To Extinction* by Megadeth. The early 90s have a special place in my heart. Geology is a subject I've always had a fascination with, and still do! The whole timescale is mindblowingly vast and helps expand the mind by putting human life into perspective. With everything we've been going through over the last couple of years, I wanted to escape humanity in a way and go back 300 million years to what the planet used to be."

Guitarists who caught the video for the self-titled lead single will have been undoubtedly impressed by its keen attention to detail, where a dinosaur called Timmy jams along to Griffiths on a James Hetfield-esque 'Yeet Fins' Explorer in a cartoon world. "The video had a lot of little easter eggs in there for people to look at," admits Charlie when we point out the Meso/Zoic amp and Boss pedals also illustrated in its epic 10 minutes.

On the recording, Charlie used a T-style Kiesel six-string ("I've always loved Telecasters – my main guitar for many years was a Richie Kotzen signature") fitted with stock Lithium humbuckers and an Evertune bridge going through his 90s 5150 amp. The leads were more of a digital affair, thanks to "various Neural DSP plug-ins like the Gojira and Nolly ones", as well as an Axe-Fx III. With Adam 'Nolly' Getgood himself drafted in to mix, Griffiths found a lot of the original digital tracking actually sounded better than later options afforded through reamping.

"With Nolly on board, I knew I could get the best out of that kind of digital gear," adds Griffiths. "He knows what sounds good and I couldn't be more pleased with how it all came out."

ROCK STAR
Charlie Griffiths, creator of "the world's first palaeontology-based prog-metal album"

"I'VE ALWAYS LOVED TELECASTERS"

Rising Stars

Charlie Griffiths picks four of his favourite modern prog players

JOE TAL

I first saw Joe playing with Textures back in the day and I loved how he and Bart [Hennephof] complemented one another on their final album Phenotype. I miss those guys! But a couple of them have formed a new band called Crown Compass and his playing on their debut album is perhaps even more insane! He's got this super tight thrash rhythm style and his solos cover all the bases of progressive metal and fusion. I love watching his picking hand which totally reminds me of Paul Gilbert. In fact people should check out their song *Gilbert* which to me is an alternate picking masterclass, and there's also an amazing country-inspired solo that reminds me of Dixie Dregs and Steve Morse.

CONNOR KAMINSKI

I know Connor's playing from Instagram and I always stop scrolling to check him out because he's always super musical and creative. Connor always seems totally in control of what's coming out of his guitar and there never seems to be a note out of place, be it a tasteful fusion-style melodic lick, or a barrage of arpeggios across the fretboard, he always nails it. In fact his latest track Bergamot features Plini as a guest soloist, which is a really cool combination. I love how uplifting that track is and it's full of great riffs and licks that will definitely inspire you to pick up your guitar. Add to all that, his tone and vibrato is really mature and musical which is always a big tick in my book.

RANDY MCSTINE

I discovered Randy a couple of months ago when I saw him play on Cruise To The Edge in his band with Marco Minneman on drums and Mohini Dey on bass. An incredible line-up, but I had no idea what to expect and was completely transfixed by what I was hearing! It sounded like Mr Big meets Zappa. Randy can not only sing incredibly well and write cool songs but his soloing reminded me of Vai with some really cool melodic legato lines which never go where you expect. He's a demon with a slide too! I just saw that Randy is now touring with Porcupine Tree, which is a very well-deserved gig for someone so talented!

CLASS ACT
Wes Hauch of Alluvial. "He's unreal!" Charlie says.

WES HAUCH

Wes is definitely a player everybody should check out. His band Alluvial is at the more brutal end of the metal spectrum. The new album *Sarcoma* is rhythmically very complex but grooves too. Although Wes is as metal it gets, he has an element of class which makes him stand out from the crowd. He's the one guy I've seen who can play Pantera and get close to Dimebag's brilliance, but he also has a fusion element to his playing and sometimes throws in some bebop style chromatic lines amongst the shred, which is a beautifully fresh sound in metal these days. To top it off, the guy can also bend one note and express so much emotion in it... he's unreal!"

"THERE'S NEVER A NOTE OUT OF PLACE"

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BEYOND THE PERIPHERY

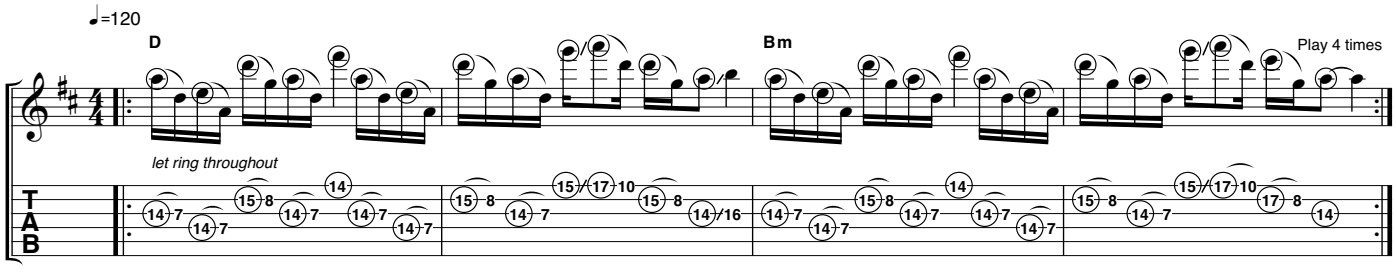
Haken's **Charlie Griffiths** dons his TG tutor's hat to bring you his very own lesson on cutting edge prog guitar

Prog has seen a huge resurgence in recent years and although the roots go back to the 70s with bands like King Crimson, Yes and Rush laying the foundations, modern players are still finding new ways to innovate and push the boundaries of guitar further. In this lesson we'll look at some of the technical and creative approaches used by some of today's finest players.

As you work through the tab exercises, try to listen out for phrases that sound familiar. Though I haven't copied any riffs or licks directly, these ideas home in on rhythmic ideas, melodic phrases and playing techniques that are part and parcel of prog guitar today. From the piano-like tapping techniques of Covet and Chon to the technical metal mayhem of Protest The Hero and Between The Buried And Me, there's plenty to get your teeth into.

1 YVETTE YOUNG / MARIO CAMARENA-STYLE TAPPING

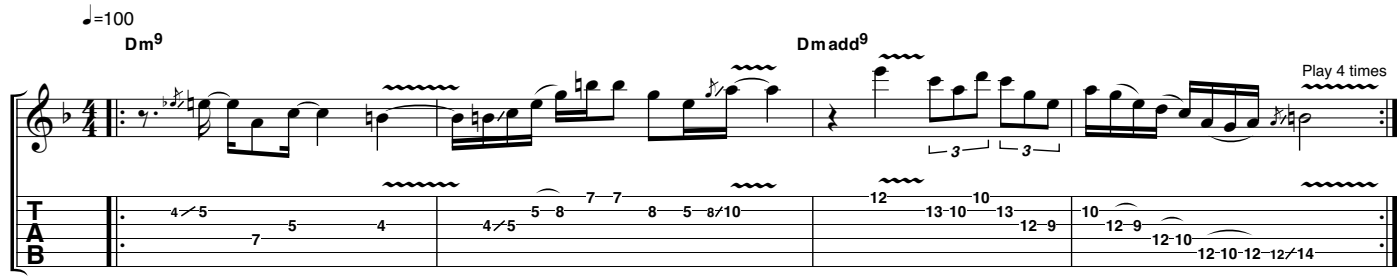
BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO



At first sight, this opening example looks like a pain in the backside to master, but it's easier than you might think! Hold down the 7th-, 8th- and 10th-fret notes as a chord throughout, then all you have to worry about is tapping. Tap with your first and second fingers on the middle strings and your third finger on the first two strings.

2 PLINI / MISHA MANSOOR-STYLE MELODIC PHRASING

BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO

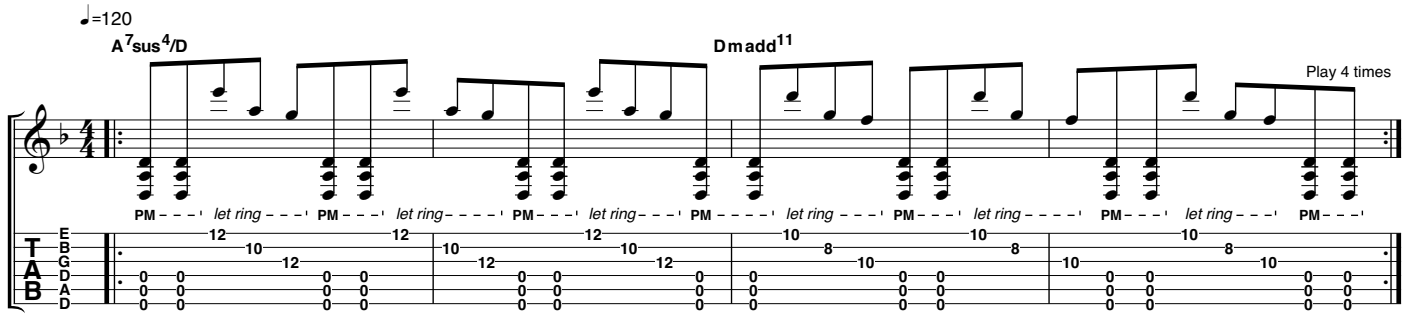


Modern prog isn't just technical wizardry. Players like Plini, Periphery's Misha Mansoor and Aaron Marshall of Intervals effectively use lyrical, jazz-fusion inspired melodic lines over djenty rhythms, and that's what you're looking at here in this Dorian mode lick. Pick softly to allow the melody to connect smoothly. Careful slides and an even vibrato will help the notes sing.

Guitars and backing Charlie Griffiths Photo Getty

3 ROMAN IBRAMKHALILOV / ACLE KAHNEY-STYLE SYNCOPATION

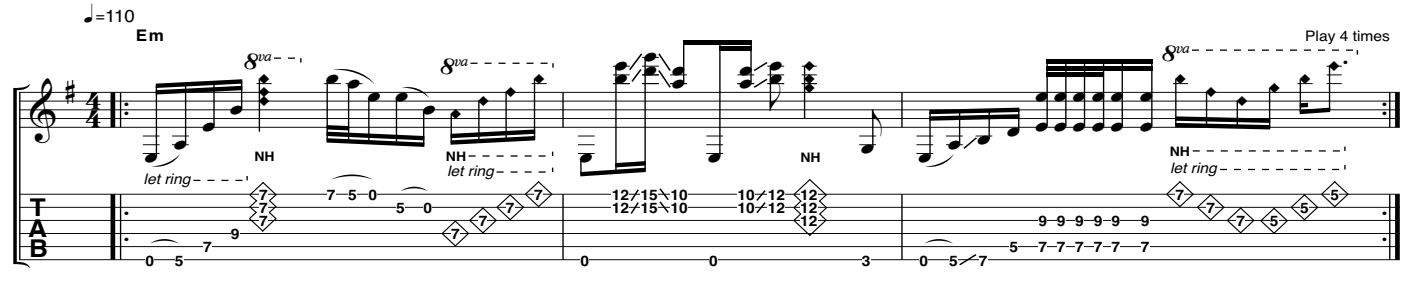
BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO



Here I demonstrate the rhythmic trickery of bands like Ukrainian prog/metalcore masters Jinjer and UK prog-metal titans, Tesseract. 'What's the trickery?', you ask? Well, our drop-D tuned riff repeats every five eighth notes, which syncopates and displaces when played against the 4/4 backbeat. Clever stuff!

4 TIM HENSON / MANUEL GARDNER FERNANDES-STYLE HARMONICS

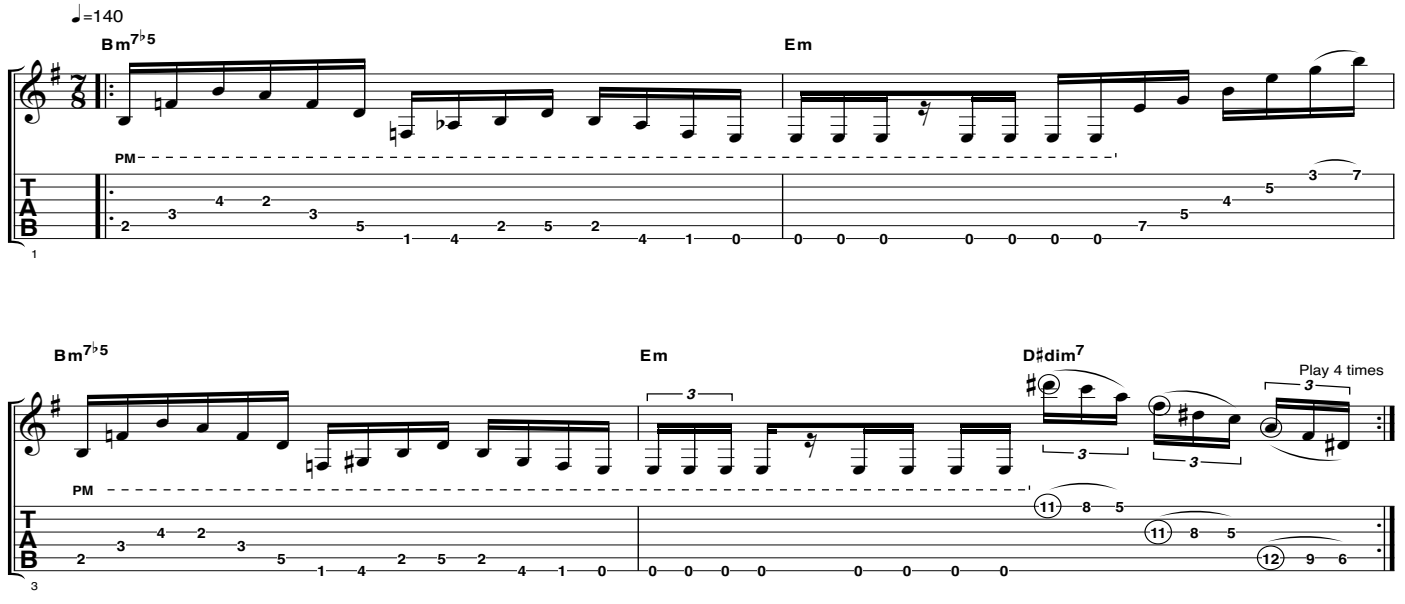
BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO



Acts like Polyphia and Unprocessed have taken clean-tone riffing to new heights in recent years, incorporating natural harmonics seamlessly into intricate chord melody grooves. For the clean harmonics here, position your finger directly in line with the fret and lift your finger off as soon as you pluck the string. Play the riff with a pick, fingerstyle, or a combination of the two.

5 TIM MILLAR / PAUL WAGGONER-STYLE TECHNICAL RIFFING

BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO



To wrap up, we enter the world of technical riffing, with acts like Jason Richardson, Protest The Hero and Between The Buried And Me proving there's always something heavier and more extreme around the corner. 7/8 time gives a progressive flavour and the rapid switch between straight 16ths and 16th-note triplets is typical prog fare.

ACOUSTIC 2022

In this 28-page TG special, we speak to four artists with very different approaches to acoustic guitar. Vance Joy is a singer-songwriter and fingerstylist who can knock out a hit song without a care for what guitar he's using. Tash Sultana has made an *Unplugged* album on their own terms – playing acoustics but also plugging in a Strat and a Tele. Polyphia virtuoso Tim Henson is breaking new ground with his new nylon-string Ibanez prototype. And, with a radical take on bluegrass, Billy Strings is making traditional American roots music relevant to a new generation.

Feeling inspired? Great! Let's get playing! Our nine-page special lesson will help you hone all the core techniques you need, from fingerstyle and flatpicking essentials to the ins and outs of modern percussive guitar. We've even prepared a short style profile of probably the most famous acoustic guitarist in the world right now, Ed Sheeran.

Finally, make sure to check out our acoustic gigging tips feature, which will help you make sure your steel-string rig always performs at its best. Turn the page and let's get strumming!

Acoustic 2022

Words Jenna Scaramanga **Photos** Abigail Shii

"WHEN YOU WRITE A GREAT SONG, YOU GET CHILLS!"

Vance Joy is a modern singer-songwriter fingerstylist who keeps cranking out hits – but doesn't care what gear he uses to make them

It's rare for a new song to crack the list of essential beginner guitar tunes, but Vance Joy's 2014 breakthrough single *Riptide* did just that. Hitting just as school ukulele orchestras were becoming popular, the uke-powered folk-pop number proved an ideal starting point for strummers of all ages. It made Joy not just one of the world's most visible young guitarists, but also one of the major inspirations for new beginners. Vance is still pleased at the impact it's had.

"When I'm learning a song I go on tab websites. Sometimes there's a list of all the most tabbed songs and *Riptide*'s in the top few," he smiles. "I've walked past people busking it, and I've walked past kids playing it in little groups if one of the kids plays guitar. It's cool that it's had that effect. It feels like some people's first song they learn either on ukulele or guitar, and that is cool. You just learn that down-up up-down-up rhythm and then you're off."

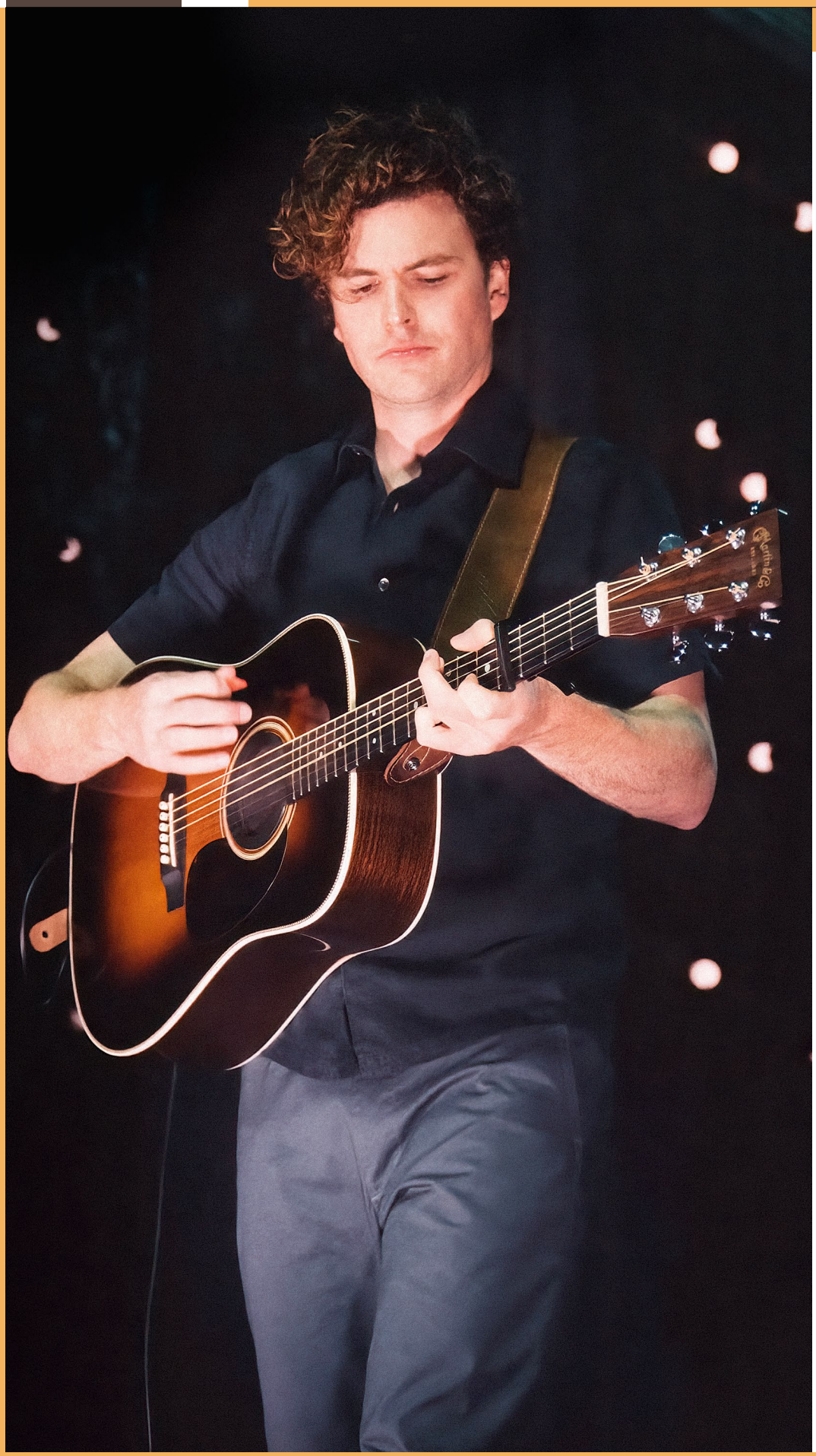
Now returning with his third album, *In Our Own Sweet Time*, Vance's sound is still guitar driven. His fingerstyle patterns are more involved than we usually hear from pop stars, and this time the sophisticated guitar lines are augmented by lush arrangements including woodwind, horns, and piano for an epic indie-pop sound. Amidst all that, guitar holds the album's centre of gravity. Vance is happy to discuss how he developed his style.

"When I was learning guitar, the songs I wanted to learn were just the most classic guitar riffs, and then Red Hot Chili Peppers songs and some Metallica intros," he says. "The fingerpicking songs that I was inspired by and tried to play were *Nothing Else Matters*, then in one of the early theory books that I got when I was 11 or 12 there was a Spanish song, *Asturias* [by Isaac Albéniz], and then also *Classical Gas* [by Mason Williams] when I got a little bit better. I never really mastered that, but enough to play parts of it."

"I DON'T KNOW THE NAMES OF MY GUITARS"

Learning to play guitar while singing is a challenge for everyone, and Vance admits he prefers to stick to favourite patterns. "When I was 14 or 15 that was such a hurdle to get over, playing and singing even just simple chord structures. When I'm playing my own songs I usually stick within rhythms that I have down pat. There's a few different fingerpicking rhythms I'm usually moving between. In all the songs it's one of those three or four, probably. It's always cool to learn a new one but when I'm playing those rhythms, singing is easy for me. Every now and then if I'm doing a cover or playing a riff that I've overdubbed in a song and I want to include it live – that's the stuff that does that thing [Vance pats his head and rubs his stomach]. Also, playing with the click in my ears, trying to stay in time with the fingerpicking rhythm. The more I do it the more I enjoy trying to trying to fit that those pieces together."

In Our Own Sweet Time was driven by lead single *Missing Piece*, with a foot-tapping palm-muted riff. Vance thinks this is where his best songs start. "The riffs that feel the strongest begin the song and they inspire the melody. The whole song is built around it." He will sometimes begin with basic chords and develop a more involved guitar part later, but that's not how he prefers to work. "The times when I've just had a melody and chords, I've tried to make a guitar riff, and if it's not really supposed to be a guitar riff vibe, I'll just



put it on piano and approach it from a different angle. Starting a song it's always good if you have a cool riff, but they don't always come along so I guess you have to noodle around until something comes. I think the best riffs that I have, I wasn't looking for them. They were just mucking around."

When he was developing his fingerstyle technique, Vance was inspired by English folk singer Johnny Flynn, "because he has a lot of cool hammer-ons and pull-offs and little noodling cool bits." Vance discovered Flynn accidentally while working as a gardener, when a friend loaded Flynn's songs onto his iPod. "I was listening randomly to Johnny Flynn who I didn't know about. I was like 'This is awesome, I love these songs!' and then I looked online and he was actually in Melbourne that night. I was like: 'the stars have aligned!'" He's also a fan of Chris Cheney of Australian rockabilly punks The Living End. "When I watch him play I'm like, 'Wow, this is like what a really gun guitar player sounds like. I suck compared to this guy!'"

Many of Vance's songs make use of major and minor 10th intervals, made by playing the root of a chord plus the 3rd one octave higher. Typically he'll play them using the A- and B-string notes from A-shape barre chords. Depending on the key, he'll allow open strings to ring out too. They're bright and colourful voicings that he stumbled upon by trial and error. "I got those shapes probably playing a cover of something. It might have even been an Incubus song. I used to play E minor shape with the two notes, and when I started moving that around I just saw it's a nice simplified chord shape, with the open notes in the middle. I just explored that." Tracy Chapman's *Fast Car* uses similar shapes, and Vance is conscious of the comparison. "It's actually hard when you're playing those notes because that riff is just so memorable and classic. As soon as you hit some of those notes, someone listening might say 'I just thought you were playing a *Fast Car* rip-off.' You have to find a way to do your own thing."

And yet for someone who loves the guitar so much, Vance is amusingly uninterested in gear. "I've got guitars floating around in different places," he says. "Some of the songs I recorded guitar just into this laptop and in that

"THE BEST RIFFS THAT I HAVE, I WAS JUST MUCKING AROUND!"

case it probably would have been a Gibson that I have. I have a Maton which I've played on songs throughout, and then a Martin as well. I don't know the names of the guitars. I don't pay great attention to it."

For Vance, guitars are tools for expression and if it works, he'll use it. "Some of the tracks we recorded before Covid and on those songs it would have been the producers' guitars. Whatever was available on the day we made the demo is often the finished product. I'll pick up and play anything. My bandmate, Sam, he's just a great guitarist. If I talked to him about guitars I'd probably learn a lot, but for me I just pick it up and play. Especially when you're playing with in-ears, you don't really always get a true reflection of the sound of the guitar. When I'm making decisions about guitars for the live show it's more about getting information from the front of house techs. If everyone's like 'this feeds back a bit; this has a bit of a ringy string' I'm like, 'Let's find the guitar that has none of those issues and then I'll just play it.' I don't have any criteria so far."

His lack of curiosity about gear extends to the rest of his rig, which was designed by a former tech and is maintained by his current one, Claire Murphy. He doesn't know the details of how it works; lights on the inputs show where to plug in and which guitar is currently active. "I've got three or four different guitars. I can just see which guitar is lit up, and I just have a tuner. I don't think I have any preamps or anything like that," he says uncertainly. "For *Saturday Sun* on the uke, the tuning is totally whack. I only play it with a three-string uke because when we wrote we were trying to figure out the chord shapes on a ukulele where the tuning was really off. I don't even know how to tune it up! Claire knows what the tuning is," he laughs. He also has one Maton acoustic tuned to D standard for songs that were recorded in that tuning.

Vance's ignorance about technical details is because he cares more about the guitar's creative possibilities. He loves the feeling of when, like "getting struck by lighting", a song comes from nowhere. "When you write a great song you're just like, 'How did I do that?' You get chills or the hair stands up your neck. I think that's what keeps everyone going." Joy's passion for invention is palpable. "There is a sense of cracking the code. You want those lightning moments and every day you go into a session excited by the possibility of that happening."

BAND OF JOY
Vance and his team take a bow.

Words Jenna Scaramanga

"IT'S FULLY PLUGGED IN!"

Tash Sultana is an artist playing by their own rules. A new *Unplugged* album features plenty of acoustic guitars – but also a Strat, a Tele and a Whammy pedal

When Kurt Cobain turned up for Nirvana's *MTV Unplugged* special in 1993, he had a Fender Twin and a Boss DS-2 distortion in tow. Purists were not impressed, but it's now the most lauded performance from *Unplugged*'s original run. In 2021, Tash Sultana showed an even more flagrant disregard for the rules, appearing with such notably not-unplugged devices as a Stratocaster, a Telecaster, and a Whammy pedal. "I had people kicking off about the fact that I was gonna do it very much plugged in," Tash recalls. "I just thought, 'Nah, f*ck 'em.' I didn't think about it being unplugged. I just thought this is a television broadcast and I'm gonna bring it."

While it's too early to say how history will remember Tash's *MTV Unplugged: Live in Melbourne*, the early response has been hugely positive. The TV broadcast has been shown in 150 countries, the furthest reach of any Australian MTV concert to date, and when the album version was released in June, it racked up 2.5 million streams in 24 hours. "I'm really glad that I stuck to my guns," Tash smiles. "I just knew I had crafted something that was worth the time."

Sticking to their guns is central to Tash's philosophy, shown in their response to MTV's initial scepticism. "When other people try and get in the way of your creative vision then it's not really yours anymore," Tash says. "Why would I listen to the guy that's in the office? You're in the office, bro!" MTV were won over when Tash revealed the performance would show them in an entirely new light. Their performances to date have been solo affairs, with Tash playing all instruments and creating loops on the fly. For *Unplugged*, Tash agreed to debut their live band. The addition of a drummer, keyboardist and bassist allow Tash's guitar and vocals to take the spotlight. "It was a way that nobody had seen me perform before. For this new era I wanted to go beyond looping and have a couple of session players play the parts that I obviously can't play at the same time," they explain. MTV were convinced, agreeing to extend the programme to sixty minutes.

All Tash's irreverent take has in common with past *Unplugged* performances is the intimacy: 150 fans in a tight space allows for a close connection with the artist. But there are plenty of acoustic guitars in evidence, and Tash's 6- and 12-string Matons sound great. Coma features a cool open C5 tuning (C-G-C-G-C-G) on a 12 string, capo'd at the 4th fret.

"ACOUSTIC GUITAR HAS MORE DYNAMIC TO IT"

Their approach to acoustic tone, though, is... not exactly what we were expecting. "The acoustic guitars are literally just plugged in and that's that." Seriously? "I do a bit of processing on them as well. I apply tape saturation to the guitars. The acoustic guitars are DI but I double it and triple it and then run it through a bunch of processing that makes it sound like it's actually in front of a microphone in a room to get a bit of depth happening." That sounds more like it. But, they insist, "I honestly really like the sound of a DI acoustic guitar and generally just go for that."

There is, however, a clear difference in Tash's approach to acoustic guitar. "I definitely play them heaps differently. On electric, even when I'm getting stuck into stuff I still try to hold back and be gentle because the tone on electric guitar thrashing it sounds like shit! Acoustic guitar has more dynamic to it because it's an acoustic instrument, so when you put that weight into the guitar you're getting the whole body of the guitar within that strum. When I play *Blackbird* I bash the shit out of the guitar, but then if I played things like *Coma* or *Crop Circles* I'm quite reserved. It's about creating dynamics. I'll use different sized picks as well. If I'm going to start digging in really hard but I want to keep the sound compressed and not ripping your face off, I'll use a really light pick. If I'm playing harder I'll use a softer pick and if I'm playing softer I'll use a harder pick."

Talk of "thrashing it" is not exaggerated. "I've cracked guitars in half on stage before. I had an Eric Johnson Stratocaster and I dropped that from head height onto the ground just out of excitement and the whole body cracked in half. We've repaired it and now it looks really sick. It's got this really thick crack through it where it's been glued back together." That Strat apparently still sounds great, but Tash is nervous about messing with their favourite gear. "I've been tossing up for ages if I want to put a Bigsby on my Ritchie Kotzen Telecaster but I don't want to risk changing the sound."

Tash also finds that Strats and Teles reward different ways of playing: "When I play the Strat I've got more of like a slinky approach to it. That's where I do a lot of the reggae snaps. Those screechy solos, they're all Strats. If I hit my Tele really hard versus my Strat, the Tele is way thicker. It's got heaps more push and body behind it than the Strat. The Strat doesn't want to be hit like that."

"Playing gentle is really hard to do when you're on stage because you're really excited," they continue. "When you are excited or if you're nervous you just lose a bit of your motor function. You get clunky instead of relaxed. When I'm about to get on stage I try to be really calm to the point where I could have a nap! When my body is relaxed I play better. I can create good dynamics in the show. When you

Dr. Chong

THINKING AHEAD
"I've already planned my next moves," Tash says.

want to go big and be rough and be loud it's more effective than coming out and doing that for the whole show. I try to be gentle so that the big bits stand out more."

The decision to include electric guitars in an unplugged set makes more sense if you know Tash's history. "When I was about 13 I'd saved up a bunch of money from a couple of years of birthdays and I bought a Fender acoustic. Then for years I didn't touch an electric guitar. I just kind of got stuck in acoustic world. I was listening to City And Colour, Dallas Green and Bon Iver. I started songwriting around that around that age. I was playing acoustic guitars at open mic nights and busking. When I would busk with the acoustic guitar I wouldn't turn a single head all day, so then I thought 'well f*ck, something's not really working here.' I took my electric guitar to the street and changed the game straight away. Now all of these songs that I wrote acoustically when I was like 16, 17, 18 years old are the most popular songs that people want to hear, whereas back then no one had the time of day for them."

The first single from *MTV Unplugged* is a prime example. "I wrote *Coma* when I was 17, and when I'd go and busk that song no one cared."

> "PLAYING GENTLE IS REALLY HARD TO DO WHEN YOU'RE ON STAGE"

With the taping being such a success, Tash was set on mixing the audio themselves. "I've done a couple of TV performances but usually the audio is just lacking. It's a quick mix and they don't care. What's the point going on TV for your sound to be handled by somebody that has no idea who you are or what your sound actually is?" The perfectionism that saw Tash record hundreds of takes for 2021's *Terra Firma* returned in earnest. "It took me three months to do it. I probably did over 120 reference mixes in the end. During lockdown there was nothing else going on so I just became obsessed with it."

Inevitably, such a gruelling mix process gave Tash ear fatigue. "You come back into the studio, listen to your mix and you're just like, 'what the f*ck!' As soon as you bring another person into the room it changes how you hear the song. All of a sudden you've brought your mate in and you can finally hear that the guitar is too loud or the vocal's too quiet."

That dedication to retaining control has allowed Tash to make music on their own terms. "The music industry is run on people in the office," they say. "It's something I'm struggling with at the moment. It's obsessed with being the biggest artist in the world and they'll do whatever they have to do to get there. It comes down to not even really liking your music anymore. You're letting other people write it for you. If that works for you then it works for you, but I could never do that. If it's not mine then I can't connect."

By contrast, Tash is now released from all their earlier record deals, leaving them justifiably proud to be "fully, fully independent." They pause. "It's a really nice spot to be in because I've already planned my next moves."

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"WHEN YOU COMPOSE SOMETHING, IT SHOULD SOUND GOOD IN ITS MOST BARE STATE"

Words Ellie Rogers

"I LOVE A RESONANT GUITAR!"

Polyphia virtuoso Tim Henson goes unplugged – with a new nylon string signature

In recent years, Polyphia have established themselves as virtuosic disruptors of everything the music world thought it knew about genre classifications. Over the course of their first three albums, the Texas-based shredders have brought metal, trap, rock, funk, and a slew of other influences together to spectacular effect.

And now, having recently added nuevo flamenco to their list of stylistic conquests on *Playing God* – the band's first new song since 2019 and their first ever to feature nylon-string guitars – Polyphia's Tim Henson has not only gone unplugged, but he's taken his non-conformist approach straight into Ibanez's workshop to develop a bespoke new tool for the job. Cue the TOD10N: a prototype nylon-string signature model for Henson.

Angelic sonics collide with devilish aesthetics in this head-turningly modern electro-acoustic, but the event that sparked the whole creative process happened back in 2019, when Henson found himself standing in a pawn shop somewhere in Europe, holding a forgotten relic from Ibanez's catalogue: an electric-nylon hybrid called the SC500N. "I'd never seen anything like it before, so I texted Ibanez and was like, 'What the f*ck is this?'" he laughs. After a brief noodle, he realised he could play much of his Polyphia repertoire – bends excluded – on the guitar, and decided to drop 800 bucks to liberate the curious late-90s design experiment and bring it home.

"At the time, I had just started getting into hip-hop production and I was doing a lot of sessions with a lot of producers," Tim recalls. "From using just the harmonic minor scale on these nylon-string guitars, it ends up sounding super Spanish and classical. I thought: what if I made Polyphia-style, classical-type loops the way beat makers sample recordings of old classical guitar playing?"

As these ideas developed in complexity and became progressively less loopable, Henson began composing whole songs in the ornate style, but he hints that we shouldn't make too many assumptions about the band's new album based on *Playing God* alone. "I would say it's a good indication that it's some of the best music we've ever made," he says, "but there are lots of vibes on the record. This is the classical, nylon, fancy-sounding vibe, but there's so many we touch."

Likewise, the TOD10N itself is one of a number of models that Henson has been developing with Ibanez, and he says that a "not nylon" version may see the light of day in good time. "I hope to follow in the footsteps of Steve Vai and come out with a few signature models every year for the next fifty years and, you know, build that legacy," he smiles.

Unlike the S-type body shape of the SC500N, the TOD10N, says Henson, "kind of looks like a Telecaster. I wanted to stay somewhat close to the traditional, single cutaway acoustic-looking guitar, while also keeping modern aesthetics." As such, it has a sleek matte black finish, and sports Henson's new 'Tree of Death' signature inlay – another nod to Steve Vai, and a dark twist on Vai's 'Tree of Life' inlay design.

Those who have been following Henson's social media may have also spotted a white prototype, though that colourway was unceremoniously ditched. Henson laughs: "I did a couple of videos with that one and people started calling it the 'slice of bread' because it's white on top and brown on the sides."

Keen to dispel some other early internet rumours, he also asserts, "I've seen a lot of people trying to say that it's a Talman. It's not a Talman. I've also seen people say that it's a solidbody. It's not a solidbody." In fact, the TOD10N has a semi-hollow design, with a discreet soundhole located on its upper bout, which, unlike traditional acoustics, projects sound directly towards the player. "It's pretty loud for how thin it is," he says, "which is awesome because I love a resonant guitar."

Throughout its development process, Tim has been busy honing new techniques informed by the TOD10N's nylon terrain, and the upcoming record will chart this progress. As he puts it: "Between every album, I think: how can I level my sh*t up?"

Having called upon fellow prog-metal pioneer Tosin Abasi for some thumping tuition, Tim recalls: "In between the first and second lesson, he also gave me two classical pieces to study. One was *La Catedral*, so that helped a bit, but *Playing God* was started before that. As you can see, the entire song is played with a pick, and it wasn't until after that I started to develop right-hand classical prowess."

As for adapting his left hand, Tim explains: "You have to be a bit more accurate. The meat of your finger has to land exactly where it's supposed to and stay very stable. You end up mainly vibratoing like a bass player where you're shifting between two frets. Bending the string doesn't really give the same tonality."

Suggesting that he's also been working on some more contemporary fingerstyle techniques, he adds: "The most recent thing I picked up because of this guitar is similar to that 'campfire' style of playing where they keep the backbeat, while playing melodies and chords."

As a final thought on his recent deep dive into the unplugged world, and how it relates to his wider musical philosophy, Tim ponders: "I've been a firm believer, even before I picked this up, that when you compose something, it should sound good and complete in its most bare state. Once it sounds good by itself, you can add whatever you want in post-production, or move it to a guitar with a whammy bar. If it sounds good on this, it's most likely going to sound good on anything."

ACOUSTIC
2022

Interview Alan Paul

"I'M FLYING BY THE SEAT OF MY PANTS!"

Billy Strings is the new star of American roots music – with a radical, groundbreaking approach to playing bluegrass

Billy Strings simply one of the most exciting young guitarists in decades. His career has exploded over the last couple of years, as he and his tight-but-loose trio of backing musicians have toured the world, putting on remarkably dynamic shows that blow up anyone's vision of stodgy bluegrass music.

Grounded in the traditional music, Strings, a 29-year-old from western Michigan whose real name is Billy Apostol, starts with bluegrass in his covers and most of his original music, before taking solos on wild flights of fancy, armed with a large pedalboard and no fear of exploring any tone or realm of music, ably supported by his backing trio of Royal Masat (bass), Billy Failing (banjo) and Jarrod Walker (mandolin).

His approach to bluegrass and the stellar interaction of his band are reminiscent of the original Allman Brothers Band – not in sound but in conception. Starting with a deep respect for and commitment to a folk music form, taking it far out in the solos and landing right back on the riff, right back in the traditional form. It's a groundbreaking approach that doesn't sound radical because it comes so easily and naturally to Billy and company. It is not part of an intellectual exercise, but just that rare combination of a totally dedicated free spirit and a highly skilled, disciplined musician – one whose roots in bluegrass music go deep…

You were just four years old when your musician father bought you a guitar because you wanted one so badly. What happened then?

He took me home and he taught me G, C and D, and he gave me a capo. Once I learned those three chords, I could play a couple of bluegrass songs. I already had the rhythm; the right hand thing was already kind of going on. I just had

KIND OF BLUE
From left: Jarrod Walker, Royal Masat, Billy Strings and Billy Failing.

"I PRETTY MUCH ABANDONED THE ELECTRIC GUITAR WHEN I WAS 17"

Photo Getty

to learn where to put my fingers with my left hand and once I knew that, I was off to the races. Especially with bluegrass, being that a lot of it is three chords, I–IV–V. If you have a capo, you can play G, C and D and play just about any bluegrass song in any key. It took me a couple years and by the time I was six or seven years old, I could play some tunes. I could hang on rhythm, and that was my deal. I never played any solos, that was all my dad. I was strictly his little rhythm player. I think that gave me a really good foundation because I learned music by ear. But listening so much for the other stuff… that's how I can tell what to do and where to go. I was really listening and paying attention to solos, how to build and play them, for a long time before I even attempted one.

Last summer you performed some shows with Grateful Dead drummer Bill Kreutzmann, where you played electric guitar…

I never play electric guitar, man! I mean, I will occasionally if a band asks me to sit in and it's a blast, but not playing whole extended shows like that. I recently sat in with Widespread Panic and got my ass kicked all around that stage. It's fun because it's just so different. It's not that I don't know how to play electric guitar, because when I was a teenager I was in metal bands and before that I played a lot more classic rock with my brother. We were heavy into Hendrix, Zeppelin and The Beatles. But I pretty much abandoned the electric guitar when I was 17 and went fully back into flatpicking. And it's been sort of an extracurricular activity ever since. Bluegrass and flatpicking are definitely my thing. And I'm most comfortable with an acoustic guitar in my hands.

But you had fun playing electric?

Yeah, and it takes a second to adapt. Like all of a sudden I have sustain! I can hold a note and let it ring for as long as I want, whereas on the acoustic guitar, I gotta play six notes or tremolo pick or something to make it sustain. With an electric, you can sing on the guitar. I was definitely faking it, but I always am! I mean, music is music to me. It doesn't matter what it is, I'm always flying by the seat of my pants! So it doesn't even matter if I'm playing with my guys who I play with every single night or someone I just met.

When you play those gigs on electric guitar, do you find that you come back to your acoustic playing differently?

Yeah, and vice versa. When I hop on the electric guitar, I play more acoustic guitar stuff, which I think comes across to more intensely guitar-focused listeners. Playing with Bill Kreutzmann is like tossing out every single preconceived notion about what you've ever thought music was supposed to feel, sound, and be like. There's just no boundaries when it comes to playing with him. It completely throws all of that 'fundamental' stuff that you need to make music work out the window and turns it into just having fun. It's like playing basketball, where you have to be totally alert and ready to catch the ball at any time. That sh*t was so fun, dude. I'll never forget that.

Now that your career has taken off so much, it just seems every tour you go out, it's bigger venues and more nights. Can you get off as much in front of 50 people or 5000? Does it matter?

It certainly does! I'm not gonna lie and say that I would feel just the same playing in the coffee house for tips as I do at the Mission Ballroom. I mean, you walk out on stage in front of a couple thousand people and they're

ROOTS ROCKERS
Strings and Royal Masat

Photo Getty

all screaming and they want to see some magic. That lights a fire under your ass. And it's always been my dream. When I was in middle school, I worshiped Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Kurt Cobain, James Brown, Bob Marley, Bob Dylan, just people who are larger than life. I don't think those kinds of people exist anymore, but being on stage in front of thousands of people cheering is a childhood dream come true.

You've talked about the influence of bluegrass legends such as Bill Monroe and Ralph Stanley, and you sometimes perform old songs such as *How Mountain Girls Can Love*, which was popularised in the late 50s by The Stanley Brothers And The Clinch Mountain Boys. With all the success you're having, you've probably turned a lot of younger people onto bluegrass music. Is that important to you?

I kind of take pride in that. A lot of the more traditional folks don't like what we're doing and say that we're not bluegrass and that we're junk or whatever. Of course, every band will have haters and people that love you. But I grew up on Bill Monroe's music, and I got a pretty good handle on it. If I could sit down with some of these people and have a conversation and maybe pick a couple songs, I think I could change their mind about what they think about me. Not that it really matters – and there's also a part of me that kind of enjoys p*ssing them off! It's like, 'Whether you like it or not, I'm still gonna play *How Mountain Girls Can Love* tonight in my concert' – and from me doing that, there's probably gonna be a couple kids there who might learn about Ralph Stanley. And that's a good thing! It's a big mission of mine. Whenever we play a show, I always add in some traditional bluegrass, because that's a part of who I am. It's how I learned how to play music, and that music saved my life. It's my heart and soul. Bluegrass music is everything I live for. I just happen to like other stuff too, and I'm so hard pressed to write a song anyways, I can't be picky about which genre it is.

ABOVE
Strings (left) with Fences guitarist and vocalist Christopher Mansfield, with whom he collaborated on 2021 single *Globe*.

"BLUEGRASS MUSIC IS EVERYTHING I LIVE FOR. I JUST HAPPEN TO LIKE OTHER STUFF TOO!"

Words Stuart Williams

16 ACOUSTIC GIG TIPS

Going live with your acoustic? Follow our fully-costed tips to get the most out of your steel-string and make your live performances the best they can be!

SET UP YOUR GUITAR

Typically from £45

Unlike electric guitars where the sound is mangled and processed through your entire signal chain, the most common objective when amplifying an acoustic guitar is for it to sound like an organic instrument – just louder. This means there's no hiding the annoying buzzes, rattles or any other noises that could ruin an otherwise great performance. You can breathe a lease of life into your guitar by getting it set up by a professional luthier or tech, leaving you with a comfortable action, perfect intonation and problem-free playing.

CHECK YOUR ELECTRONICS REGULARLY

From £2

You know what can kill the intimate storytelling of a delicate acoustic performance? That intermittent burst of ear-splitting noise from the jack socket you "keep meaning to do something about". If you don't want your audience looking back in anger, it pays to keep an eye on your guitar's electronics. Prices vary, but you can find new jack sockets and pots (potentiometers, i.e., volume knobs) for under a fiver. Ask a local guitar tech to replace them for you.

SET YOUR PHASE TO 'STRUM'

If you've ever wondered what the phase switch on your preamp is for, the answer might well be revealed the next time you experience a huge swell of low-end feedback on stage. By flipping the phase of your guitar, you'll throw it out of alignment with your amp and (hopefully) help to tame some of that uncontrollable wave.

FIGHT FEEDBACK FURTHER

£6.99

Your acoustic is a big, empty, resonant box of air, which can either sing sweetly or howl horribly if pushed into feedback. You can reduce this risk by literally stuffing the body with absorbent material (fabric) to stop some of the vibrations. Or, you could try a soundhole cover such as the D'Addario Screeching Halt PW-SH-01, or Martin FBR2. These block off the guitar's soundhole, breaking the chain of resonance to some degree and ensuring a feedback-free sound on stage.

LEARN ABOUT EQ

Your guitar might have a multi-band EQ on its preamp, which enables you to sculpt your plugged-in sound in greater detail than a simple tone control. It's worth setting your rig up as you intend to play it on stage and experiment with different EQ settings to work out what you prefer and what works best. If you want to get further into the weeds with it, a dedicated EQ pedal or preamp with detailed EQ settings can help you shape your tone, and eliminate feedback.

COMPRESS TO IMPRESS

From £25

A compressor reduces the dynamic range of the signal that's plugged into it, and can be a versatile tool for acoustic guitars to help keep things consistent and remove wide fluctuations in dynamics that might cause feedback. As well as this, compression can emphasise attack, boost sustain and have a big effect on the response and feel of your guitar. It's great in a full band situation where you want a tight, present acoustic sound that won't get lost in the mix. Just like EQ, some preamps (see boxout) include compression.

PICK UP A PICKUP

£65

How do you go about gigging if your guitar is totally acoustic, with no onboard preamp or pickup? A retrofit pickup is the solution to this problem and the good news is you can get yourself plugged in without breaking the bank. LR Baggs and Fishman are the big names in acoustic pickups, or, at £65, Seymour Duncan's passive (no battery required) Woody SA-3 HC magnetic humbucker is a great value unit to try if you want to experiment. It's a breeze to install and remove, with no permanent modifications to your guitar needed.

GREAT SOUND ON STAGE? IT'S IN EAR!

£99

There's a lot of noise to battle on stage, and if you're going direct into a PA system with an acoustic guitar then your only hope of hearing it will be through a wedge monitor. Turn that up and it's pushing your guitar's sound directly up and into... you guessed it, your guitar, which as we've learned by now is going to cause feedback. In-ear monitors not only give you a much more detailed sonic picture of your guitar, but they help to keep the stage quieter, and they'll also block out ambient sound, protecting your hearing at the same time! You don't have to splurge on custom-moulded or wireless

models, but consider some affordable in-ears such as the Shure SE215 if you're struggling to hear yourself and the rest of the band. It'll be a revelation.

ANALYSE YOUR PLAYING

Your playing dynamics will have a massive influence over the way your guitar sounds. From the attack of the note to the projection of the guitar, you can control your tone simply by paying attention to the power of your strumming and picking. The harder you hit the string, the further you're activating the resonance of the top, back and sides you paid so much attention to when you bought the guitar. The key is knowing how and when to exploit your guitar's tonal qualities to best suit the playing situation. Which can be aided by our next point.

SELECT YOUR STRINGS

£8.99

What strings do you play? We're guessing you'll answer that question with a brand and preferred gauge. But how much attention do you pay to the metallic make-up of your acoustic strings? From the bright and mid-scooped sound (albeit at an arguable lifespan cost) of 80/20 bronze, to the warmer response of phosphor bronze, to the reduced finger noise of flatwounds, there's a lot of tonal variation to be had from your strings. For longevity, try some coated strings Such as Elixir Nanowebs, and don't forget that gauge can also play a big part in how your guitar projects as well as feels.

FIND THE PERFECT BLEND

Just as with the rest of your setup, it's worth spending some time figuring out how to get the best tone from your guitar. If you have an internal mic, magnetic pickup or both on your acoustic alongside the humble piezo, take some time to dial it in through your rig or PA. This way you'll get a feel for what works and what doesn't before you have to do it in front of an audience.

TAKE YOUR PICK!

60p

An acoustic guitar has a huge dynamic and tonal range for us to manipulate, and you shouldn't overlook the building blocks – starting with what you're using to attack it. The great news is that a tenner will buy you a lot of plectrums, and will allow you to select the best type for your playing style/tonal goals. Thinner picks are more flexible and will give against the strings, perfect for laying a lighter strumming texture. Thicker picks will increase the attack of your notes which are great for helping you to cut through when needed. Don't forget the pick material, either. Go to your local guitar shop and p-p-pick up a selection of plectrums to experiment with.

CHOOSE YOUR CHORDS WISELY

This isn't only important in an acoustic/electric line-up where you're potentially battling against an electric guitar and rhythm section, but also applies to open-mics and multi-acoustic ensembles too. You want your guitar to be heard, so choose different chord inversions to what the other band members are playing. Open chords typically work well with acoustic parts, and will most likely help you to stay out of the way of your barre chord-wielding bandmates.

CAPO'D CRUSADER

From £5.00

As we just mentioned, the lush, full sound of an acoustic guitar resonating with open chord shapes is a thing of beauty. But not all songs and keys lend themselves to this type of playing. That's where a capo comes in. As basic as a pencil and a rubber band (please don't!), or as flash as an aerospace-engineered precision vice, a decent capo will be your best friend when the key moves up the fretboard. Tighten it down neatly and evenly across your fretboard (make sure you buy one for a curved 'board, not a flat classical fingerboard), then train your brain into transposing open chord shapes, and you'll never have to choke your chords with a barre again.

SET, DON'T REGRET

With so much air moving around on stage, it's important to pay attention to where you place your amp, monitors and mics in relation to your acoustic guitar in order to avoid feedback. Where possible, avoid your amplified signal pumping directly back at you or your guitar and try to keep the on-stage volumes as low as possible to help eliminate the risk of squeal.

DON'T RULE OUT EFFECTS

You may think of your acoustic guitar signal chain as an un-soiled haven of purity. But while utilitarian pedals such as EQ, compression and volume might be your go-tos, there's room to try some other stuff too. A little reverb or even modulation goes a long way to adding dimension to the none-more-direct sound of an under-saddle piezo, and Nirvana's triumphant MTV Unplugged performance even featured some overdrive on Kurt's Martin D-18E. Give your pedals a try, and you might just discover a new angle to your acoustic sound!

LIVE, AND LET'S DI

Want greater control over your direct sound? Here are three acoustic preamp pedals for your bucket list

T-REX SOULMATE ACOUSTIC

£349

The T-Rex Soulmate Acoustic is bursting with features for acoustic players including a compressor, chorus, delay and some pristine digital reverb algorithms. On the utility side there's a 3-band EQ, automatic feedback suppression, and a tuner. They've even bundled in a looper to boot.

LR BAGGS VENUE DI PEDAL

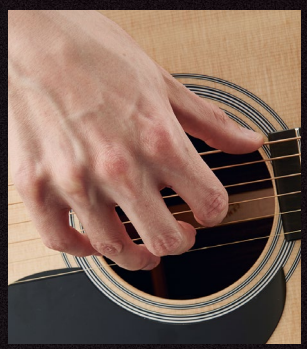
£315

Essentially giving you a more detailed set of features as a well-stocked on-board preamp, the Venue DI from electro-acoustic know-it-alls LR Baggs features a five-band EQ with a feedback-busting, tuneable notch filter, phase switch and stage-ready tuner. Ideal if your acoustic features a passive pickup or if you just want the controls where you can see them.

FISHMAN AURA SPECTRUM DI

£319

The Aura Spectrum DI makes use of Fishman's fantastic Aura acoustic imaging technology,



FINGERPICKING TECHNIQUE

The easiest way to fingerpick is to use your thumb to pick the three bass strings, and your index, middle and ring fingers for the third, second and first strings, respectively. You can play a lot of music without any variation on this approach.

Words Jon Bishop Photos Abigail Shii

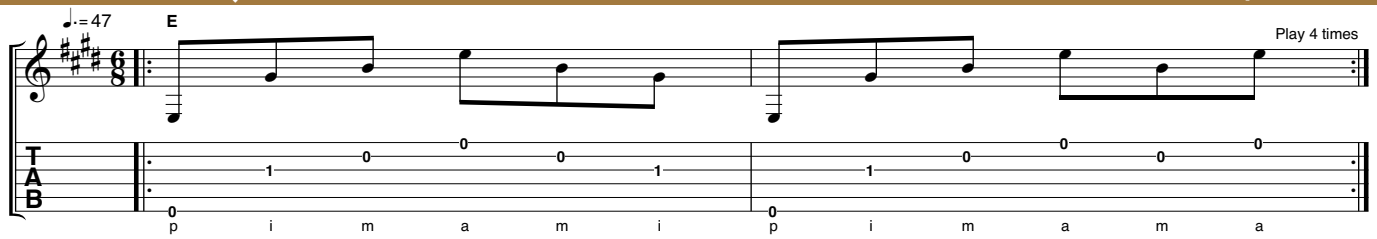
ACOUSTIC GUITAR LESSON

Take your acoustic guitar playing to the next level with our multi-styled technique lesson. We begin with a crash course in the essentials of fingerstyle...

To kick things off, we have three exercises designed to improve your fingerstyle technique. We're talking essential basics here – there's nothing *too* challenging to play, but the exercises will help you get used to the core techniques of players as diverse as Chet Atkins, Tommy Emmanuel, and contemporary pop acts like Vance Joy and Passenger. To allow you to concentrate on your picking hand all our examples use the easy to finger open E chord as a foundation.

1 BASIC 'PIMA' TECHNIQUE

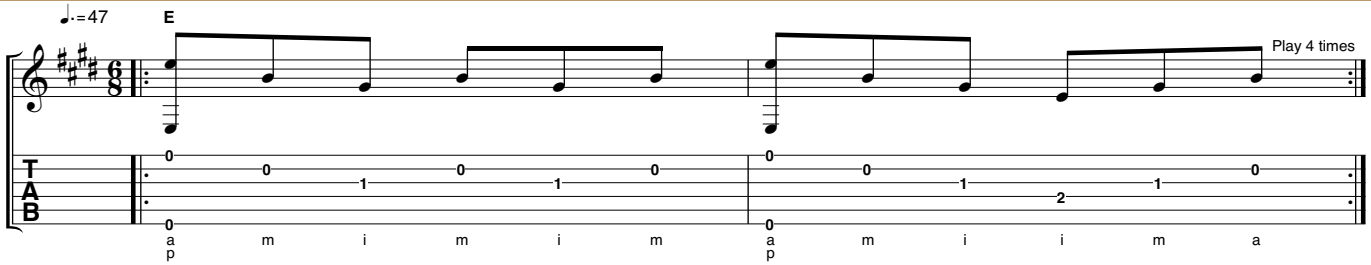
BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO



This first example is designed to get all your picking fingers working together. In traditional music notation the picking hand is labeled p for the thumb, then i, m and a for the first, second and third fingers.

2 THE PINCH

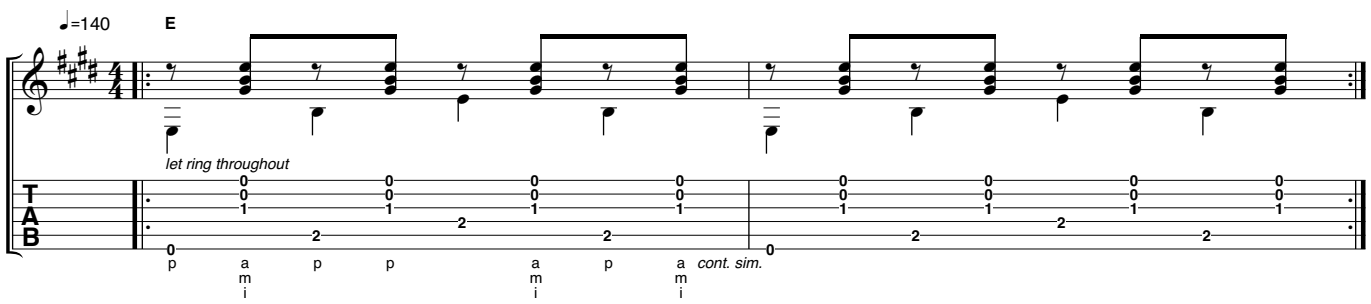
BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO



This example opens with two notes picked at the same time – a technique known as a 'pinch'. It's an essential ingredient of fingerstyle technique and allows for the melody notes and basslines to be played together. Notice in bar 2 how the i, m and a fingers are moved to play on the D, G and B strings.

3 BASS & CHORDS

BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO



Again, we're using an open E chord as our foundation here. This example will help to develop your thumb facility by introducing a simple bassline across the three low string. Each bass note is followed by a plucked chord played on the top three strings.

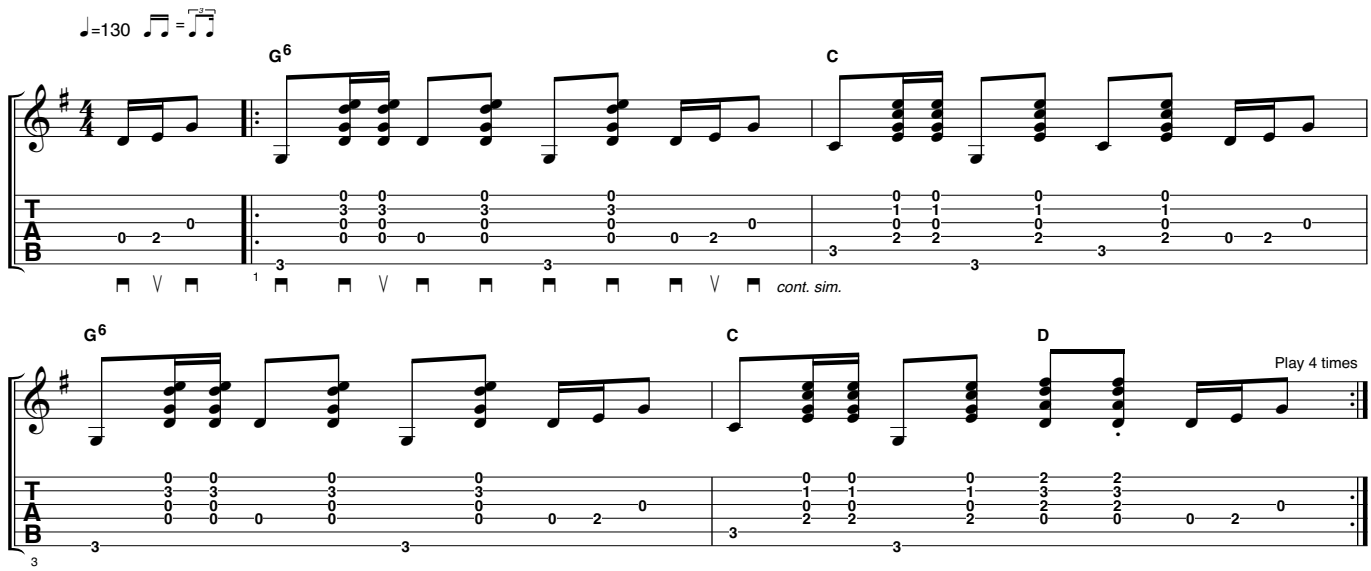
PLECTRUM PICKING

That little piece of plastic is the key that'll unlock your playing potential. Improve your picking skills now!

For many players, how we use our picks isn't a crucial part of our everyday guitar playing. We strum and pick, but don't necessarily think too hard about the technical side. However, picking becomes more important when you encounter a song that goes beyond basic strumming. Perhaps there's a bassline mixed in with some chords you're playing, or a quick melodic run. Take a look at our tab examples to help hone these skills, with the perspective of acoustic guitar playing.

1 STRUMMING WITH EMPHASISED NOTES

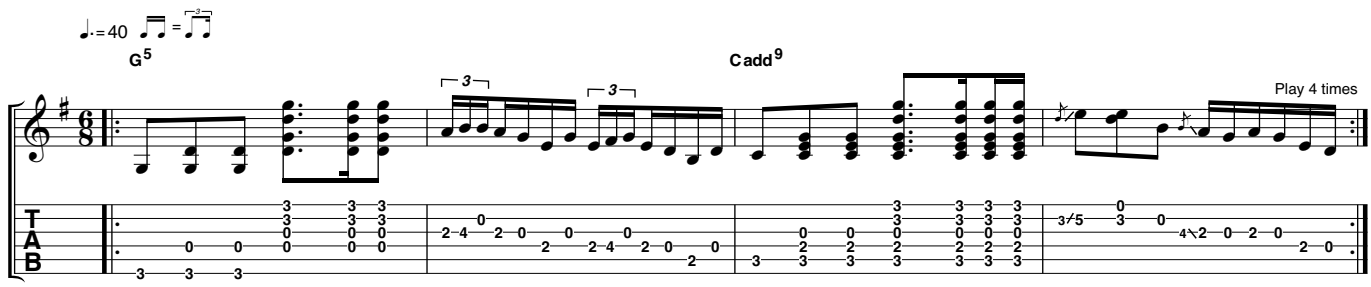
BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO



Here we're breaking out the 12-string acoustic for a line inspired by songs like Tash Sultana's MTV Unplugged performance of *Coma*. You don't need a 12-string, though. Any steel-string will do. We've played our single-note phrases quite distinctly, but you can easily let more of the chord tones ring out with this technique.

2 FLATPICKING

BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO



Bluegrass stars like Molly Tuttle and Billy Strings are monster flatpickers (a fancy term for picking with a plectrum), and, though we suspect it'd take most of us a few years of practice to get to their level, there's still plenty to try out. Here we're keeping to a manageable tempo as we look at how to mix chords with flatpicked lines.

Photo Getty

NYLON STRING GUITAR

Dust off that old nylon-string and take a look at some creative ways to use it in your music

Hands up who has a classical guitar gathering dust in the loft or locked away in a cupboard? Okay, now put your hand down and go and show your neglected nylon string a little love, just as we are here with a couple of lessons that'll help you think differently about this oft-overlooked instrument. We've taken our inspiration from Polyphia's 2022 track *Playing God* and from the modern flamenco sounds of Jake Bugg's *The Happiest Man In The World* soundtrack album.

NYLON STRING CLASSICS...

Five great nylon-string guitar songs

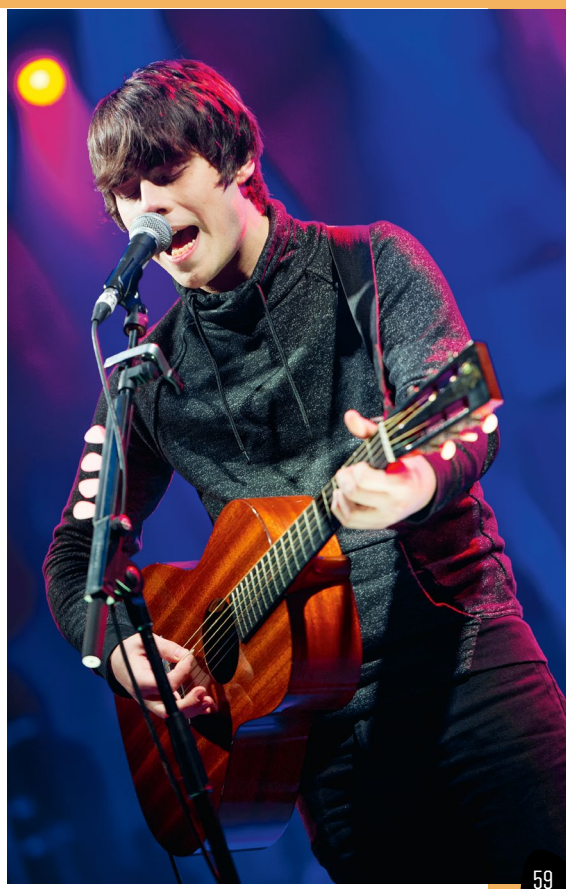
Eric Clapton – *Tears In Heaven*
Eric's *MTV Unplugged* hit is one of the biggest guitar songs of the 90s, and a great fingerstyle piece to learn.

Ben Howard – *Keep Your Head Up*
Howard is a highly accomplished fingerstylist. This EADGAD-tuned track from his debut might be enough to keep you practising for weeks.

Dire Straits – *Private Investigations*
A beautiful, epic track with Mark Knopfler using the nylon-string guitar as a lead instrument instead of accompaniment.

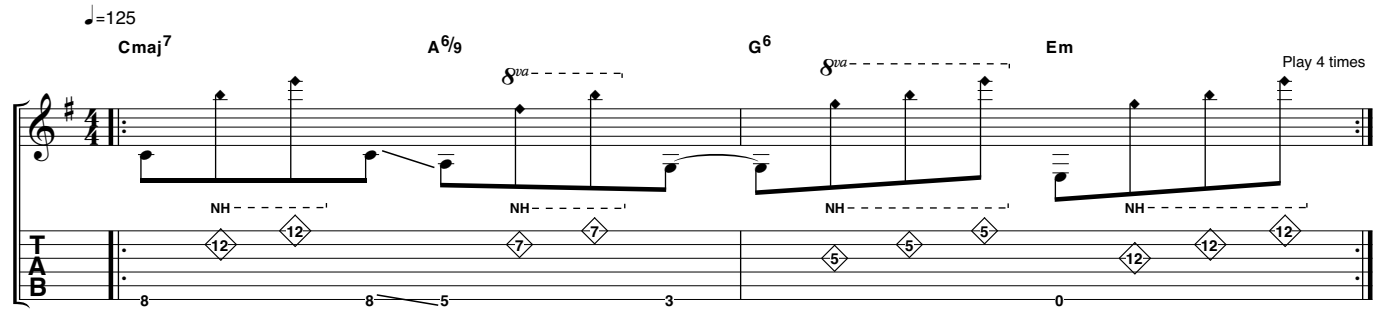
José Gonzales – *Heartbeats*
A cover version it may be, but for most this 2003 cut by the Swedish singer-songwriter remains the definitive arrangement.

Opeth – *Porcelain Heart*
This epic tune from the Swedish prog-metal titans features the dark, ambient moods of reverb-soaked nylon-string guitar.



1 POLYPHIA-STYLE HARMONICS

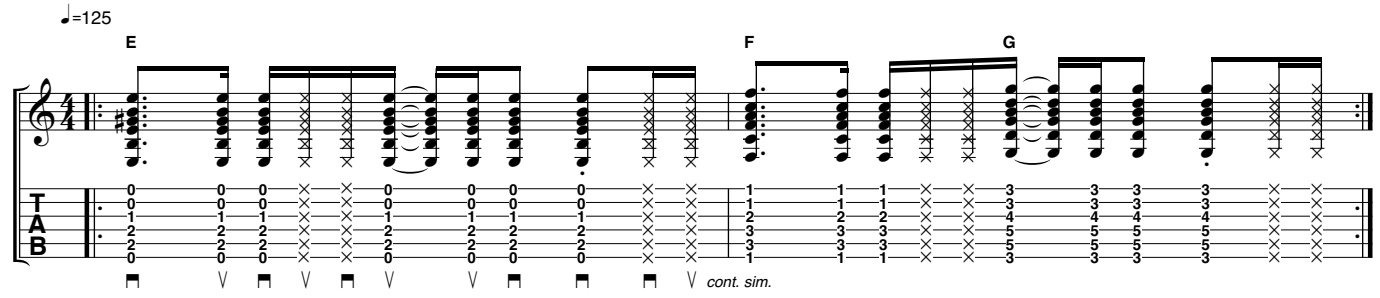
BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO



Here, we're combining a simple bassline with natural harmonics, Polyphia style. The natural harmonics are played by lightly touching the string above the fret indicated in the tab. The challenge is getting them all to ring out cleanly as you change positions. Practise just the harmonics at first and add the bass notes as you gain confidence.

2 JAKE BUGG-STYLE MODERN FLAMENCO

BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO



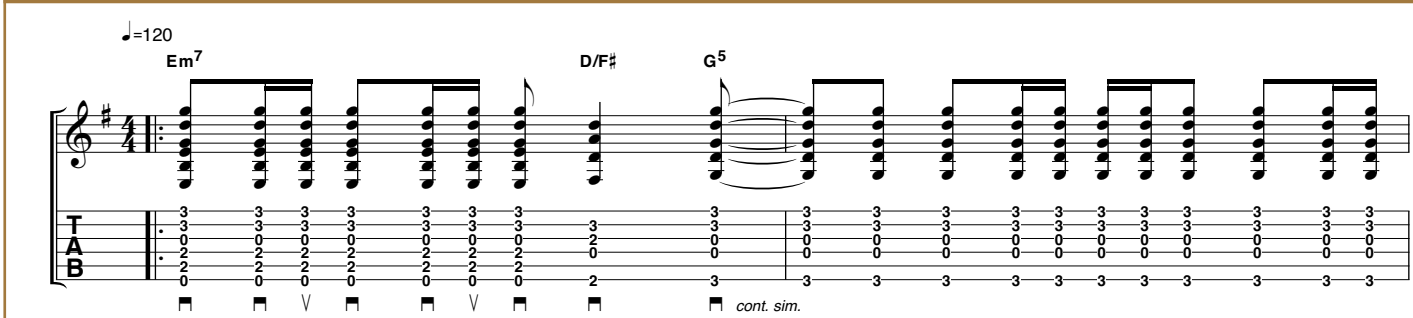
An unexpected turn from Bugg, his soundtrack album for *The Happiest Man In The World* features a raft of nylon-string pieces covering, samba, jazz and flamenco – and that's what we're looking at here. For an authentic tone, the fingers are used for strumming. Aim for a relaxed strumming motion to help provide a consistent delivery.

ED SHEERAN-STYLE RHYTHM GROOVES

He's probably the most famous acoustic guitarist in the world. Take a look at some of Sheeran's signature techniques

Perhaps the most notable aspect of Ed Sheeran's acoustic guitar playing style is the way he uses his pick hand. Generally preferring not to use a pick, Ed has a loose style that allows him to combine fingerpicking, thumb strumming, finger strumming and basic percussive techniques into an unconventional playing style. The secret sauce is of course a looper pedal: Ed loves to layer up these techniques into a huge wall of sound. Here we look at some of his trademark approaches.

1 16TH NOTE STRUMMING BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO



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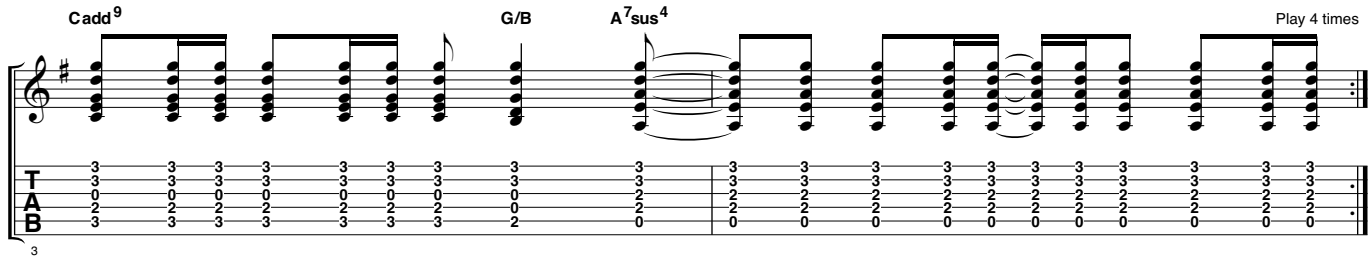
1 16TH NOTE STRUMMING (cont'd)

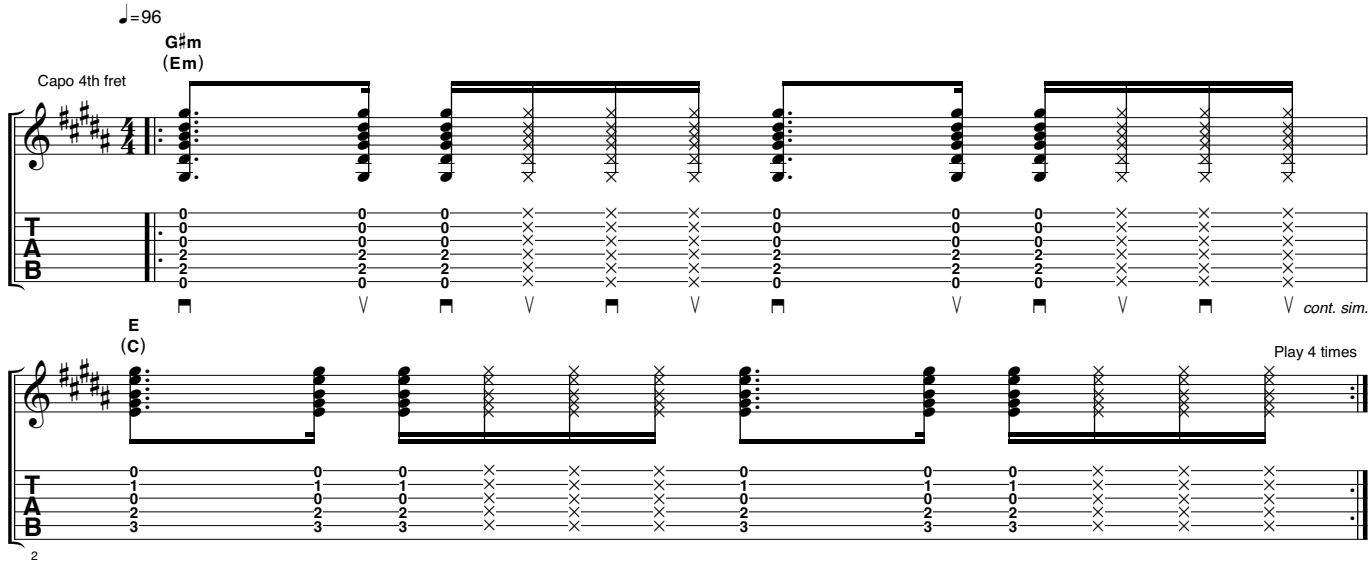
BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO



Ed often uses frenetic strumming to create the excitement in his live shows. Our example is in the style of Ed's live acoustic versions of *Castle On The Hill*. Ed generally favours strumming with the picking hand fingers as opposed to using a plectrum. If you've got a looper pedal, start with a part like this, then add riffs over the top.

2 4TH-FRET CAPO

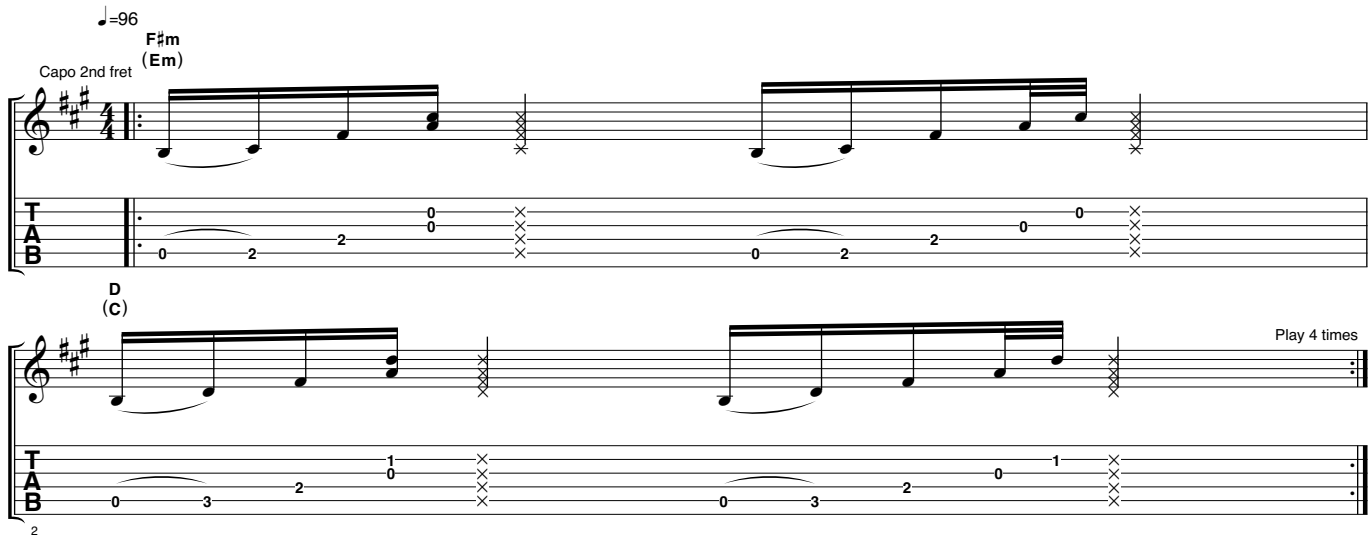
BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO



Here, the capo helps open position chord fingerings to sit within Ed's vocal range and as an added bonus it also drops the action down, making everything a bit easier to play. The muted strokes add a percussive quality.

3 FINGERSTYLE AND BACKBEAT GROOVE

BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO



This example features a modern-sounding fingerstyle loop combined with a slap on the backbeat. The fingerstyle arpeggio can be slightly arpeggiated by spreading the picking fingers as you pluck. The percussive slap on beats two and four is created by hitting down on the strings with the picking hand. Simple!

ACOUSTIC BLUES

Get your mojo working with the sweet sounds of slide and some soulful fingerstyle blues

Here we're taking a look at two core techniques in blues: slide guitar and fingerstyle. The former can be particularly tricky if you've never tried it, but there are some key tips which we've outlined below.

Perhaps most important is to use an open tuning (we've used open G in our tab example). By tuning your guitar's strings to the notes of a simple major chord, you're assured of a sound that 'works' as you lay the slide over several frets at once.

SLIDE GUITAR BASICS

1 Wear your slide on your third finger
Use a different finger if you prefer, but the third finger is easiest to control and you can fret notes higher or lower than the slide if you need to.

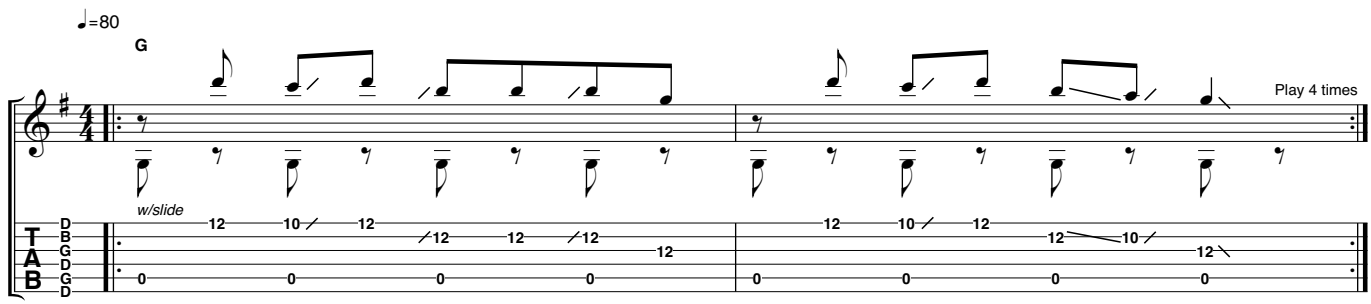
2 Mute the strings for a cleaner sound
Tame excess string noise and make slide lines sound clear by keeping your first and second fingers in contact with the strings behind the slide.

3 Aim to play directly over the frets
Play in tune by positioning your slide directly over the frets, not above or below them where you usually place your fretting fingers.

4 Float with your slide... or don't!
For a smooth, floating sound, rest the slide on the string without pressing down. For a more aggressive sound press down with your slide, Derek Trucks style.

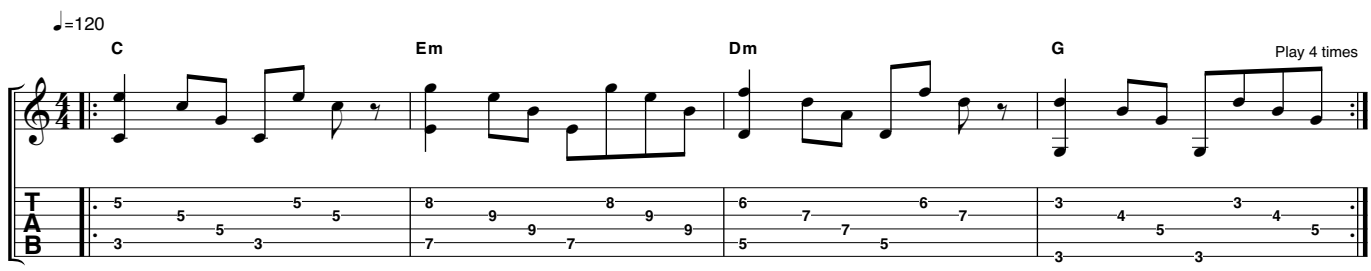
Photo Getty

1 KEB MO-STYLE SLIDE LICK — BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO



For this slide example, we break out our open G (DGDGBD) tuned resonator guitar (though any steel string acoustic will do). Notice that the bassline is a regular quarter-note open-string note. This allows you to practise the top slide line on its own and only bring in the bass notes as you get comfy.

2 JACK JOHNSON-STYLE POP/BLUES — BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO



Jack Johnson's laid back blues-tinged acoustic pop guitar lines and catchy vocals have made him a global star for over two decades. Our example uses a one-bar fingerstyle pattern that features the pinch technique The picking pattern is repeated throughout, except on a small variation in bar 4.

MODERN FOLK

Try out a handful of creative fingerstyle and percussive guitar ideas...

Maybe it's the influence of Ed Sheeran over the last decade or so, but the folk scene appears to be in rude health in 2022 – which can only be great news for us guitarists as there's a wealth of artists to take inspiration from. Whether you're an aspiring fingerstylist who prefers a 'traditional' approach, or if you're looking to develop some upbeat body-bashing percussive guitar techniques, we've got you covered with our straightforward lessons.

BOOM! THWACK! TING!

Your essential percussive guitar guide...

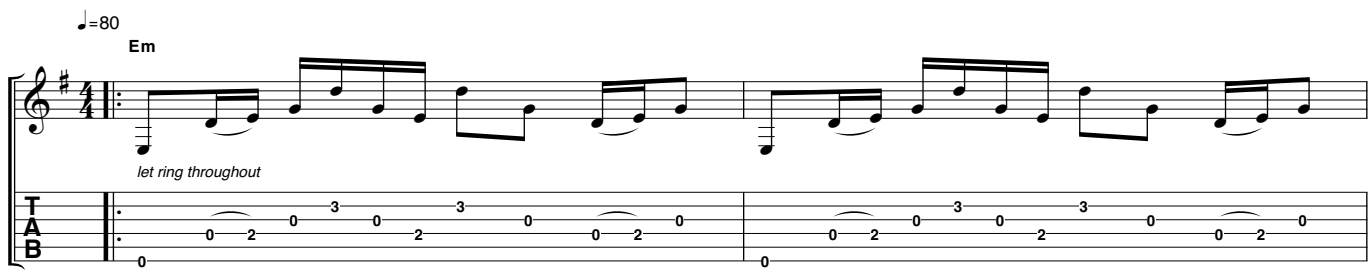
Whether you take inspiration from greats like Michael Hedges and Preston Reed, or if you prefer the current crop of artists like Jon Gomm, Marcin Patrzalek and Alexandr Misko, there's one common element to percussive guitar: creating pitch-approximate strikes akin to a kick drum, a snare and hi-hats. In reality, this is only a rough starting point. You could think of the mid-pitch strikes as snares, toms, congas, even bongos – it's not an exact science! And where to strike the guitar to get these sounds varies from player to player, song to song. Here's what you need to know to get started.

1 Kick drum
Strike using the fleshy part where your hand meets your wrist to produce a low thud like a bass drum. We're targeting the guitar body above the strings near the soundhole.

2 Snare drum
You need a cutting sound without too much bass for a snare drum vibe. Jon Gomm and Newton Faulkner will often flick the pickguard area with a middle finger.

3 Hi-hat
For the full drum kit effect you'll need to include a sound in the treble range. Pat the strings down against the frets with your fretting hand for a hi-hat vibe.

1 REPEATING PATTERNS BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO



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1 REPEATING PATTERNS (cont'd)

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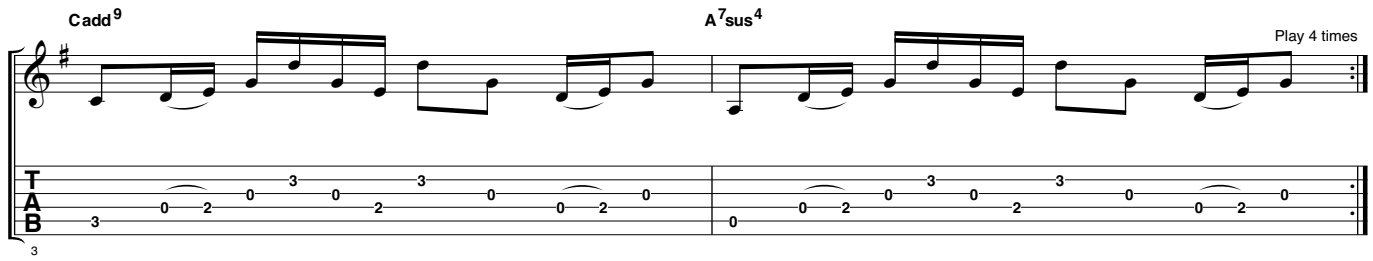
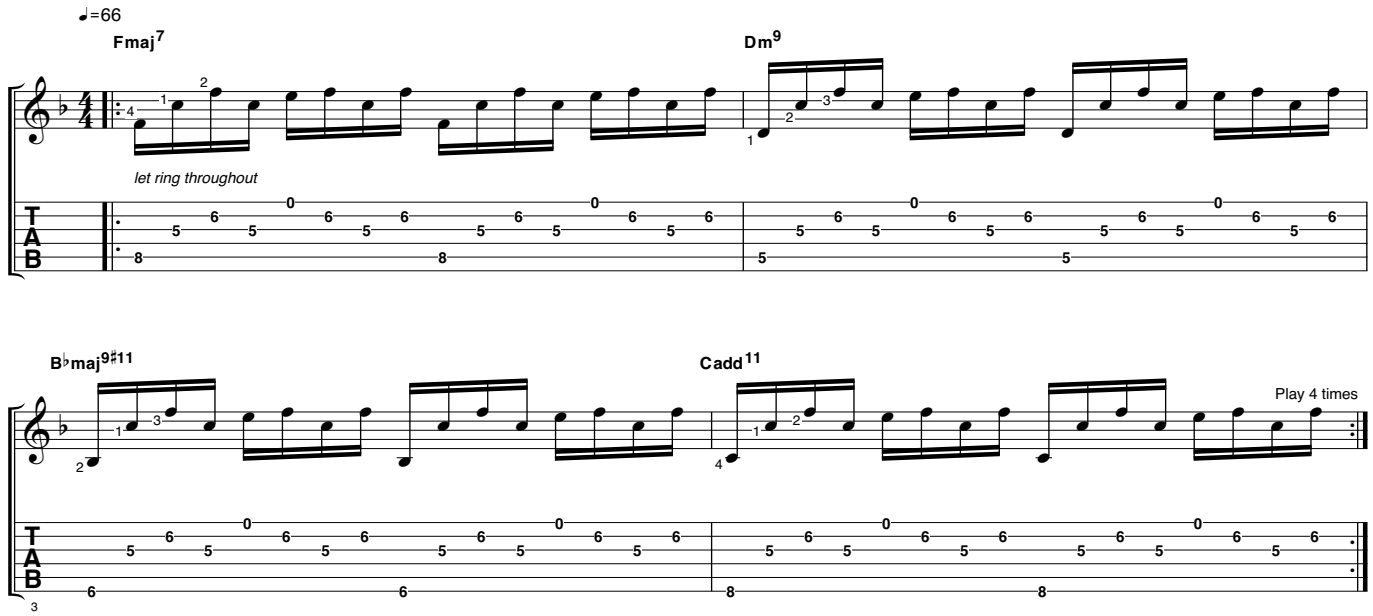


This example uses a repeating pattern – it's the kind of thing you'll hear Ben Howard, Ani DiFranco and countless other players do. Our bassline is a little awkward to finger, and it is included on the backing track, so perhaps practise the pattern on the top three strings before finally adding in the low notes.

2 HAMMER-ONS IN FINGERSTYLE

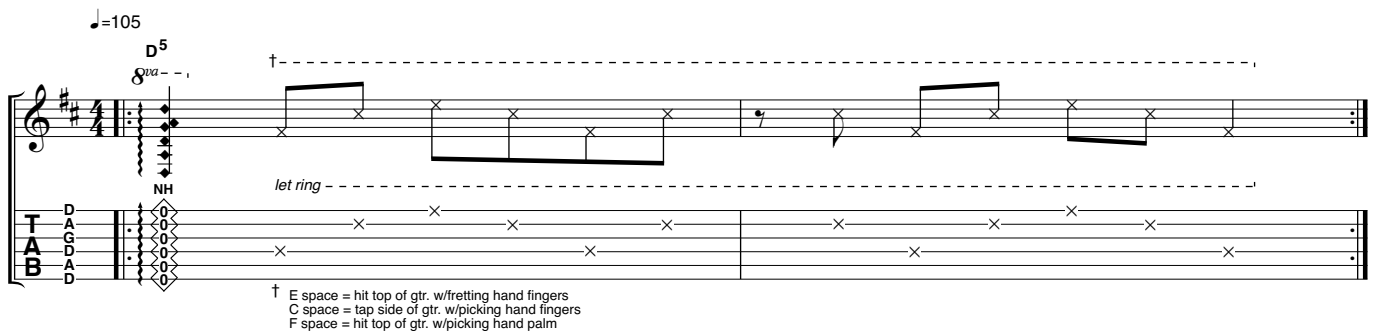
BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO



For this example, we are building hammer-ons in to a fingerstyle pattern. It's a commonplace technique used by everyone from greats like Jimmy Page to contemporary pop acts like George Ezra. Worthy of a little of your practice time then! For best results here, try to keep all the notes ringing out at all times.

3 PERCUSSIVE GUITAR

BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO



For our percussive exercise, the guitar is tuned to DADGAD – which sounds great (and, crucially, neither major nor minor) when open strings ring out. We're using three strikes: a low-ish hit, equating to a kick drum, and two in the midrange – snares or toms. The bass is shown low down, with the midrange strikes shown higher up.

T5V

T8V

T7V

T10S

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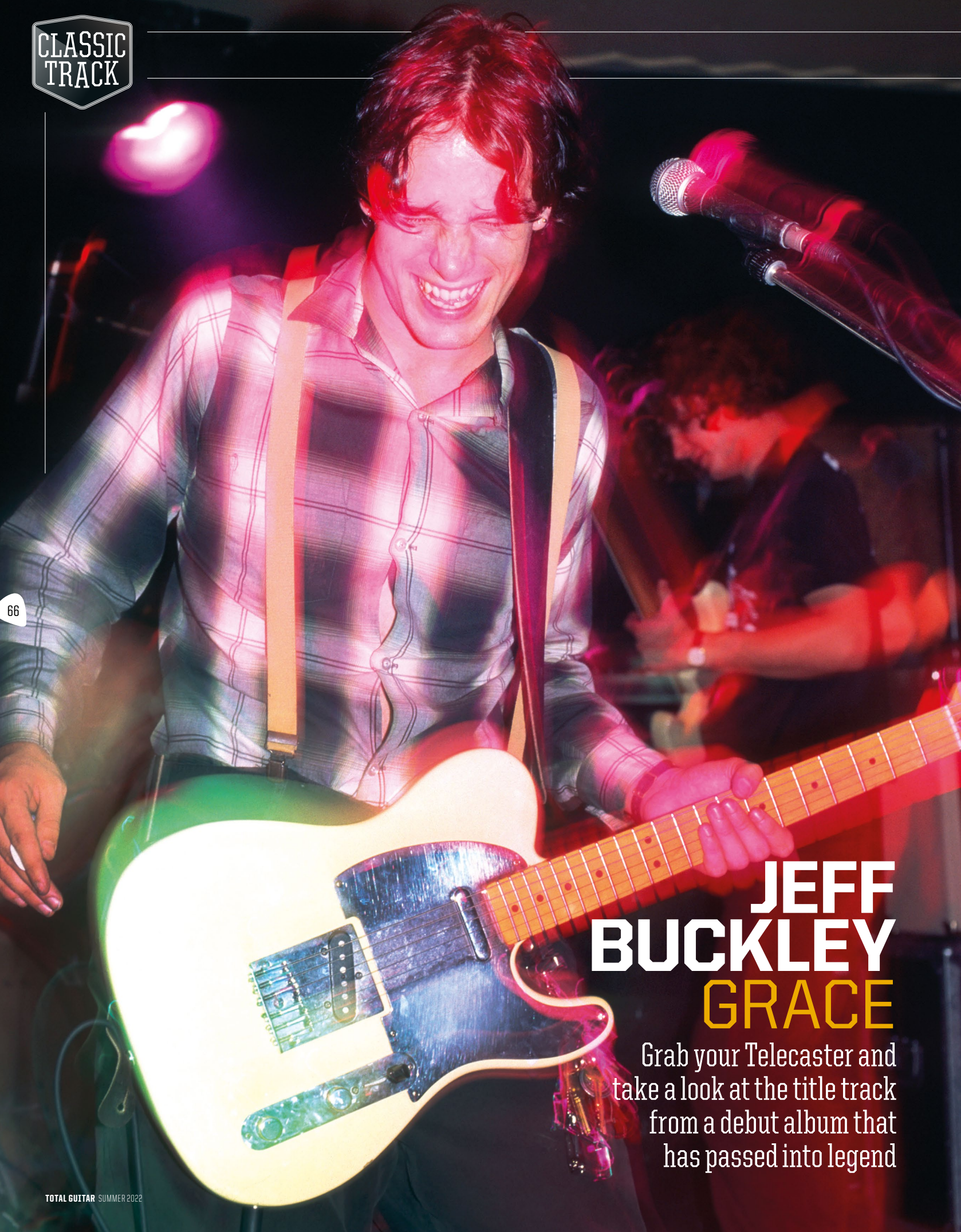


JEFF BUCKLEY
GRACE

Grab your Telecaster and take a look at the title track from a debut album that has passed into legend

By the time Jeff Buckley's body was tragically dredged from the Mississippi River on 4 June 1997, his collaboration with guitarist/songwriter Gary Lucas had given the world barely a dozen tracks. Most are cult favourites. This one, the song that gave his lone studio album its title, *Grace*, is a stone cold classic.

Lucas explained the recording process to TG in 2011: "We doubled the parts, but mainly on *Grace* I'm doing this ambient guitar, like at the beginning. First, I did the band track with the band and Jeff playing, then I had a whole session overdubbing space guitar. There are lots of little bits on that song where people don't know what they are to this day. Well, it's my guitar. There's the bit where Jeff sings 'I'm not afraid to die', and the guitar goes '*wargh*' – that's me doing a sighing guitar part using a whammy bar on a harmonic D chord.

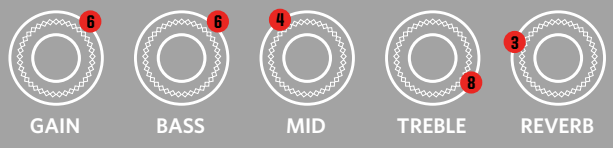
We've tabbed the guitar parts here, but we'll leave you to work out the '*wargh*'!

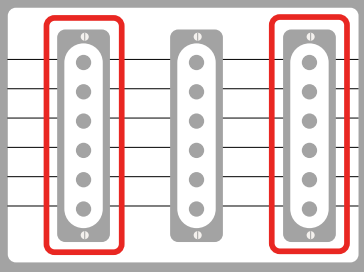
GET THE SOUND

Everything you need to know before playing 'Grace'

GET THE TONE

CHANNEL CLEAN



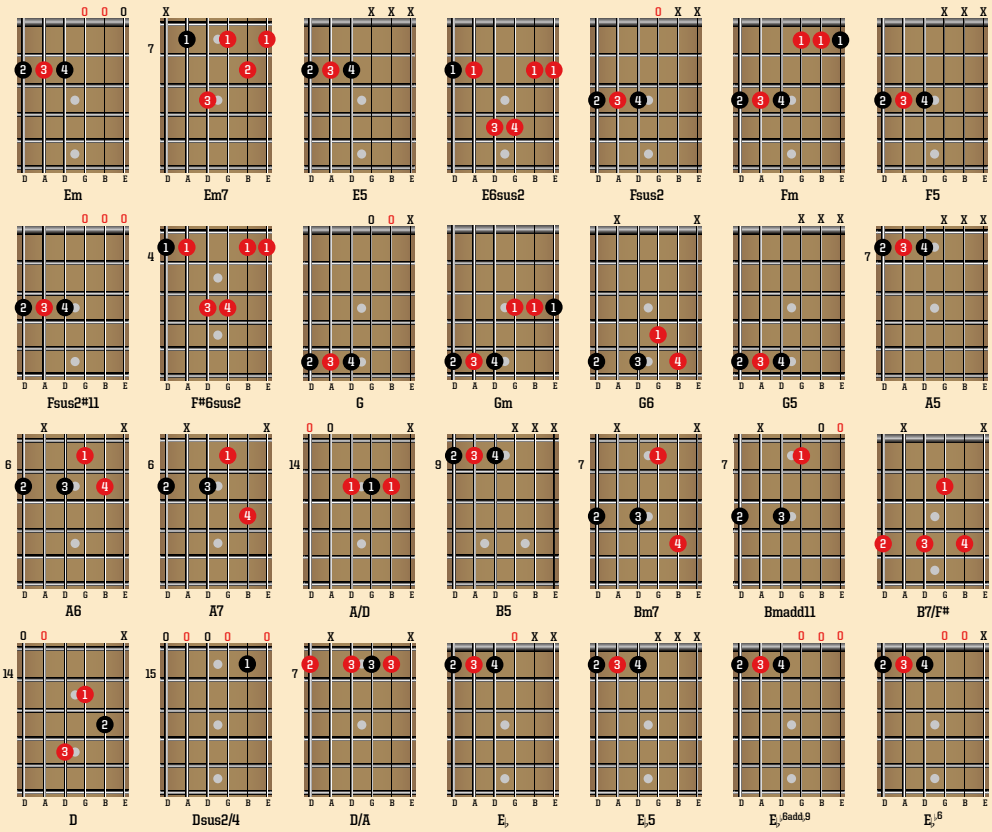


For live performances, Buckley and Michael Tighe tended to switch between the bridge and neck pickups.

With at least eight different guitars playing on Grace, ranging from electric arpeggios that open the track to the ethereal volume swells that pepper the tune, there's no single guitar sound to achieve. However, most of the rhythm guitar parts use a clean, bright sound, probably coming from Buckley's '59 Fender Telecaster and Fender Vibroverb combo. Add a touch of subtle chorus for a warm shimmer, or a more full-on flanger setting for the aggressive rhythm guitar in the outro. Finally, you'll notice a whammy bar instruction in the tab; studio guitarist and collaborating songwriter Gary Lucas used his '64 Strat for this.

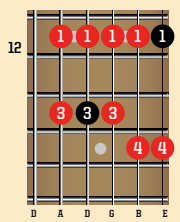
CHORDS

Many of the chords make use of the drop D note on the sixth string. Chords like E minor, E♭ and Fadd9 are easier to play this way. You can either use your second, third and fourth fingers or barre across three strings with a single finger. G6, A6 and B7/F# occur in the same run. If you follow our fingering for these chords, you'll find the changes easier. Barre across the second, third and fourth strings at the 14th fret with your first finger for the D chord in the hammer-on riff.

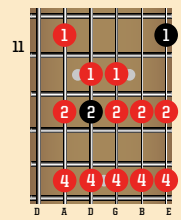


SCALES

With the solo in the song being so difficult to discern and little in the way of conventional harmony in the tune, it's hard to recommend any particular scale, but the E minor pentatonic and E♭ major scales will see you through much of the song. Drop D tuning makes it hard to include the sixth string.



E minor pentatonic scale



E♭ major scale

Guitars and backing Simon Young. Words Henry Yates. Simon Young. Photo Getty

JEFF BUCKLEY
GRACE

GRACE
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JEFF BUCKLEY GRACE Intro (arpeggios)

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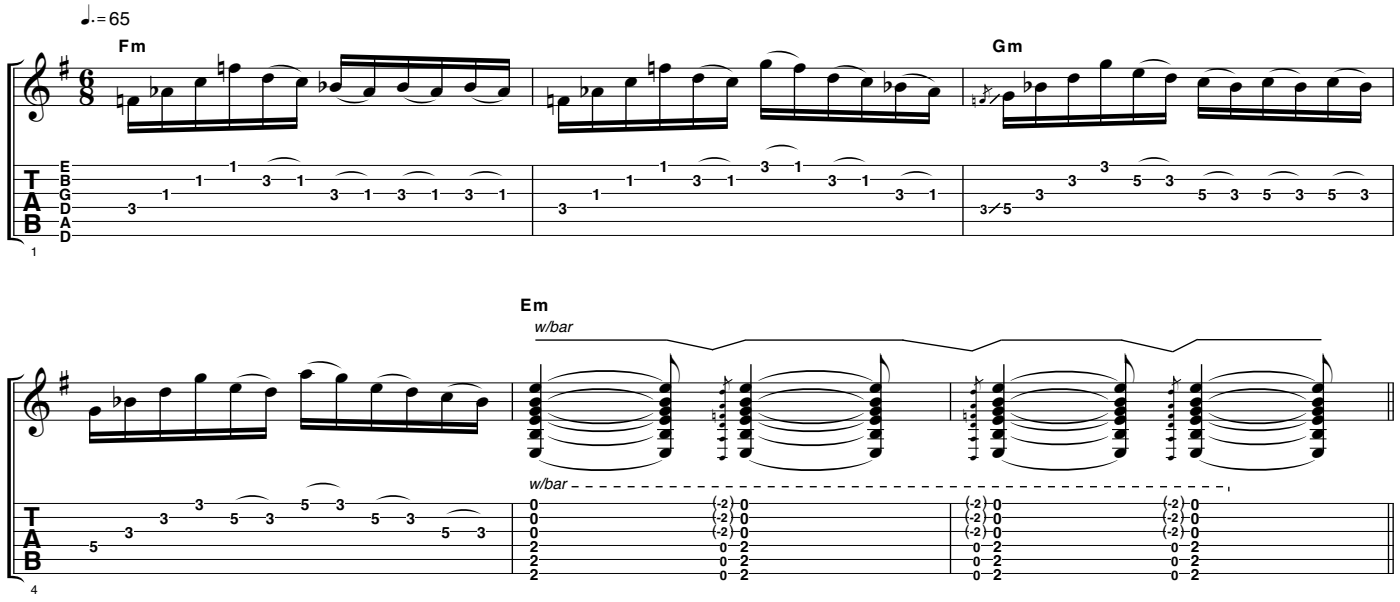
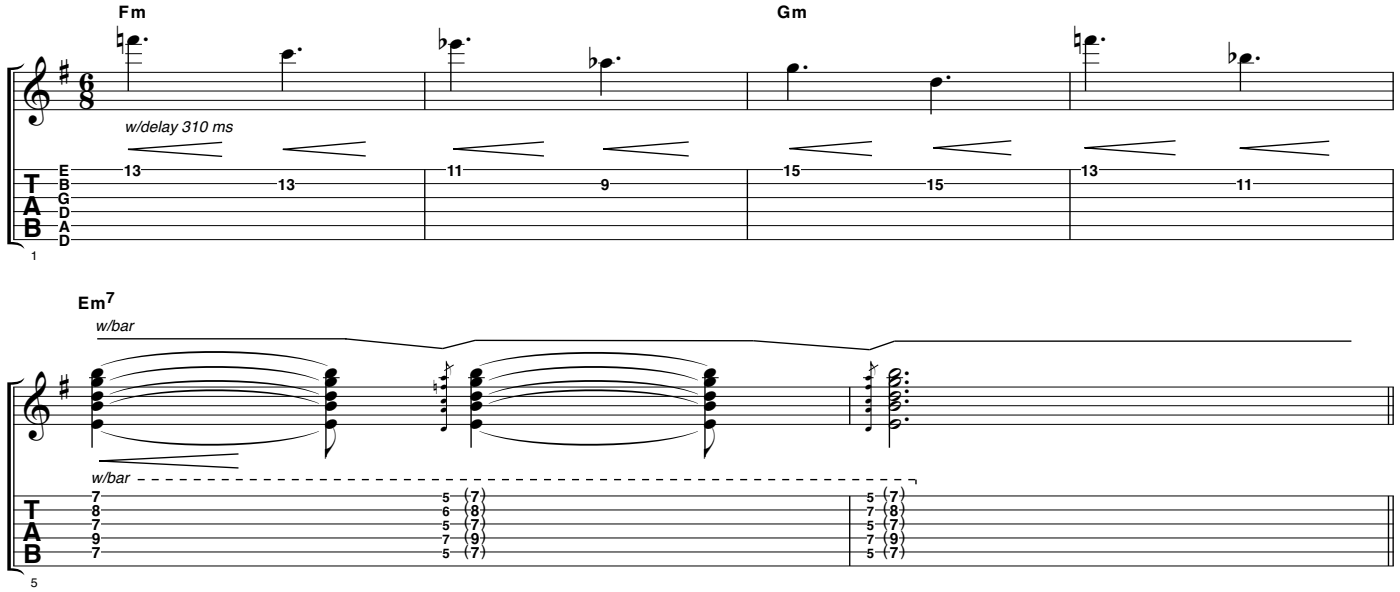


Fret the F minor and G minor arpeggios with a first finger barre and an additional third finger note. Use a downward sweep of your pick across the strings as you ascend the arpeggio. This part requires slow, methodical practice to build up to Buckley's speed.

JEFF BUCKLEY GRACE Intro (violined melody)

BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO



Violining is the technique of sounding a note with the volume turned down, then bringing the volume up, creating a gradual violin-like swell of sound. This part is low in the mix and is more audible in live versions, where Michael Tighe plays simple fretted notes without violining. Fret the initial high F with your fourth finger, followed by your third, second and first finger respectively for the following three notes.

JEFF BUCKLEY GRACE Intro (hammer-on riff)

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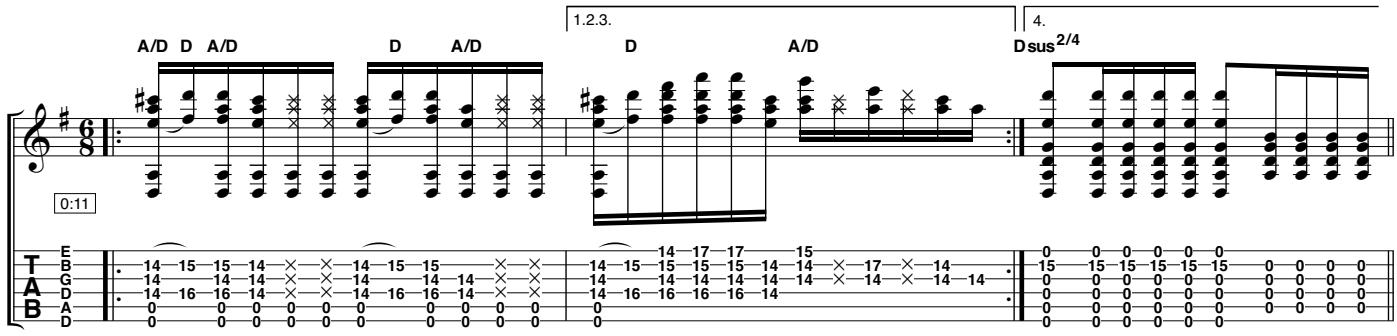
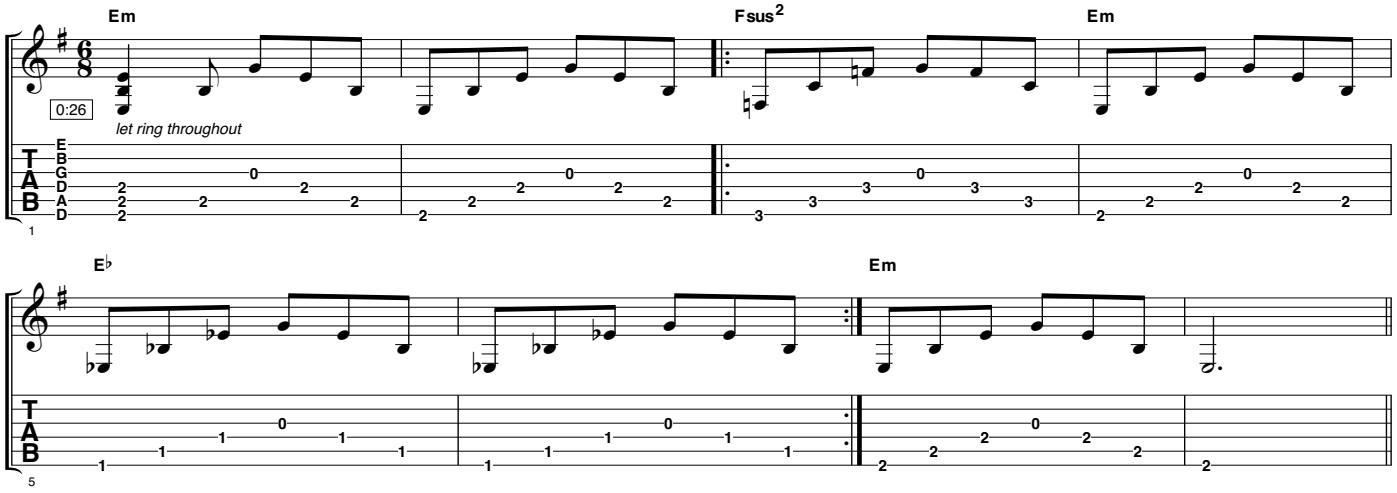


Barre the top four strings at the 14th fret with your first finger and hammer on with your second and third fingers. Lift your fingers just off the fretboard to silence the strings for the muted notes. You may need to experiment with your hand position so that you can reach the 15th and 17th frets on the first string.

JEFF BUCKLEY GRACE Verse

BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO



Although you may be able to use your first finger to barre the bottom three strings, it's better to use your second, third and fourth fingers, since this will put you in position to fret the ascending chords of the pre-chorus that follows. Use downstrokes as you ascend the arpeggios but use upstrokes as you descend in pitch.

JEFF BUCKLEY GRACE Pre-chorus

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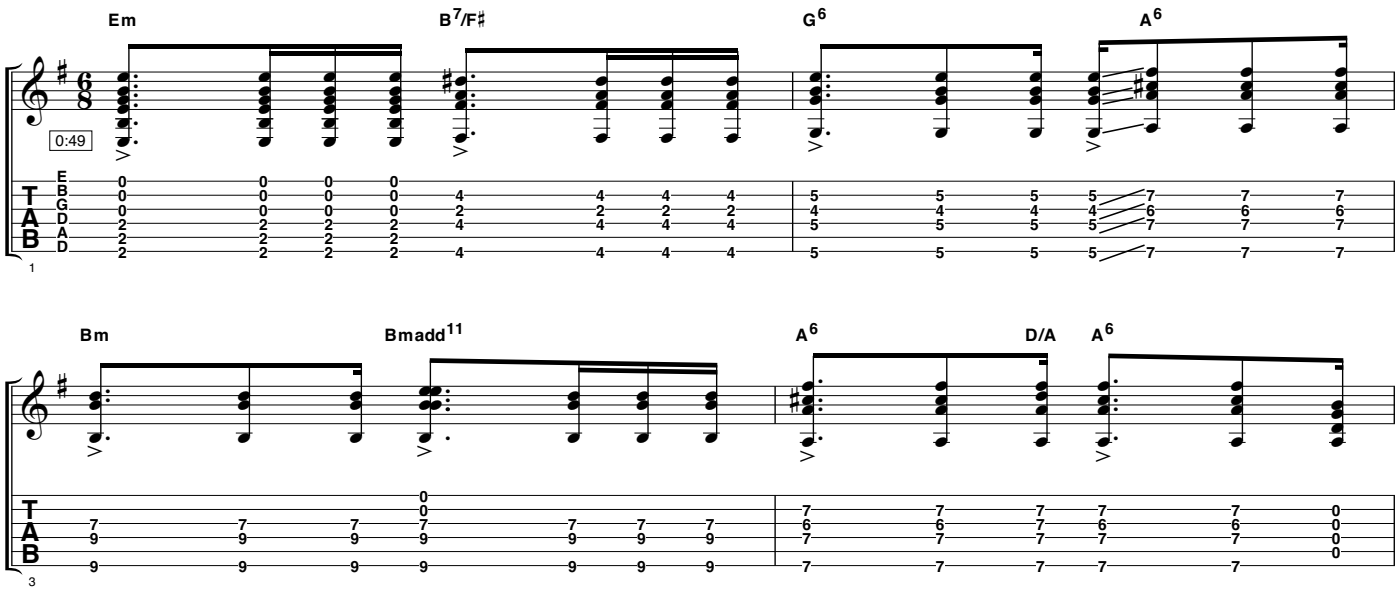
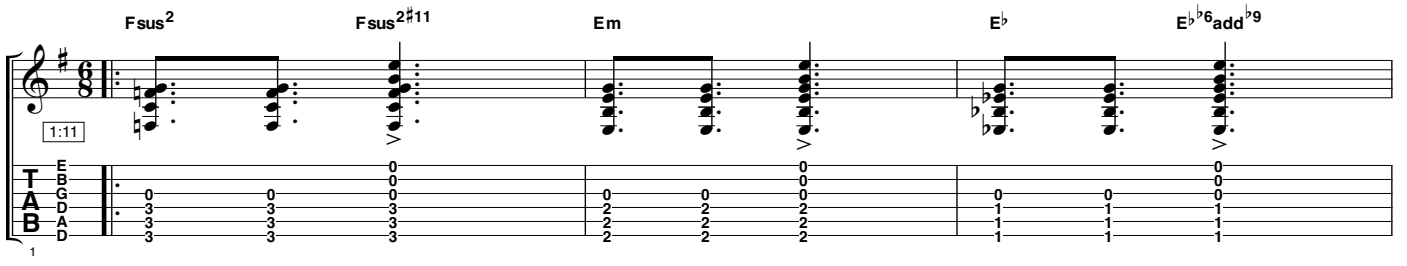


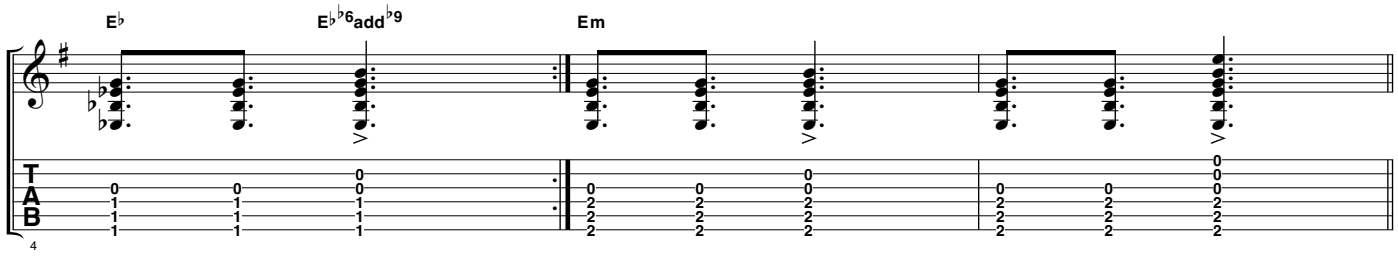
JEFF BUCKLEY GRACE Pre-chorus (cont'd) **BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO**

Keep fretting finger movement to a minimum for these ascending chords. After the B7/F♯ in bar 1, keep all four fingers on the same strings until the D/A chord in bar 4. Keep a relaxed alternate picking movement. Don't worry about playing the rhythm exactly as written , there are five guitars all playing slightly different rhythms.

JEFF BUCKLEY GRACE Chorus **BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO**

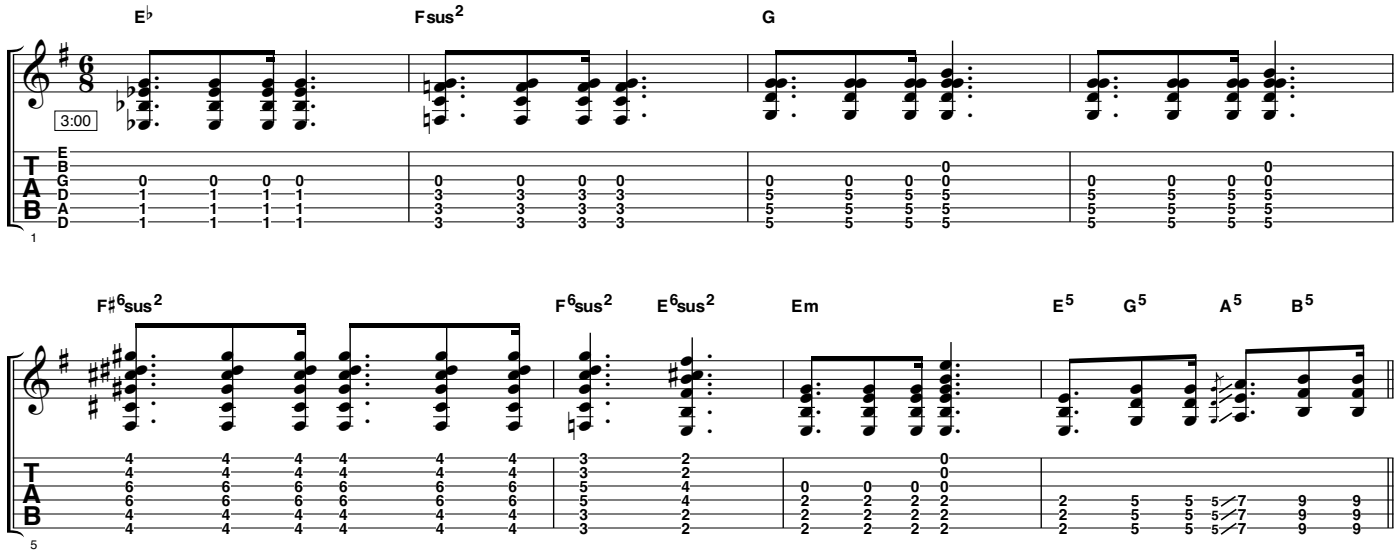


JEFF BUCKLEY GRACE Chorus (cont'd) **BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO**



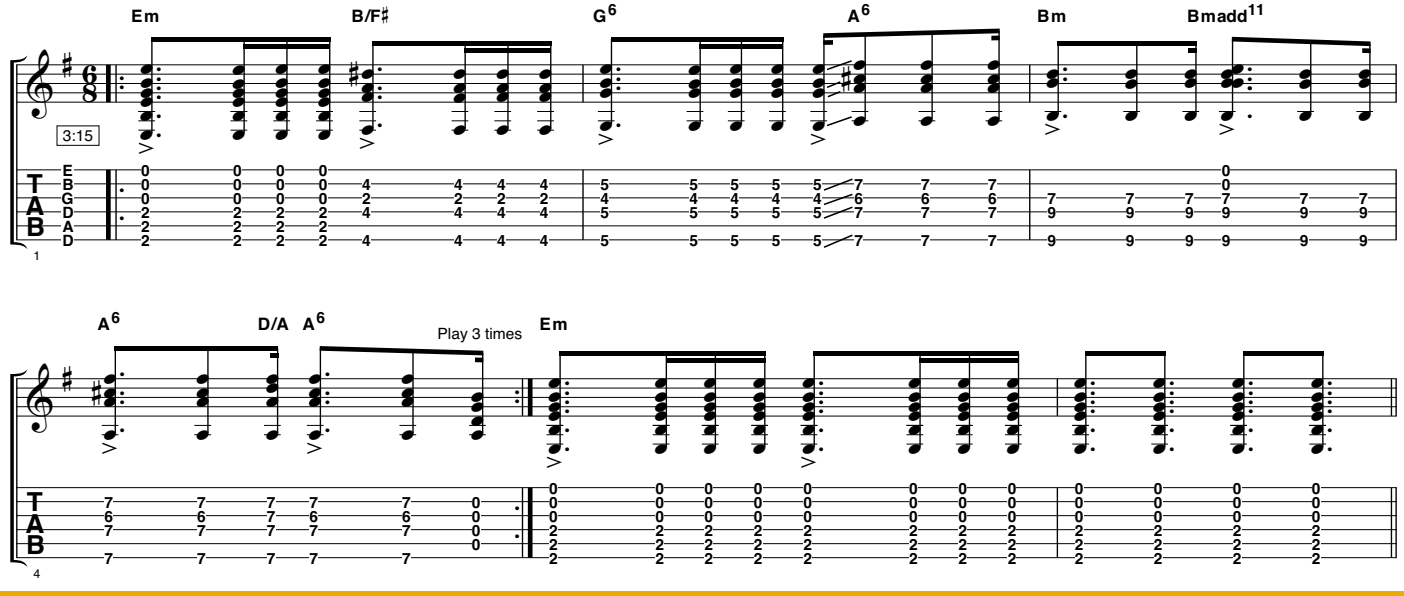
As with the verse, use your second, third and fourth fingers to fret these chords, keeping your fingers perpendicular to the fretboard to avoid muting the open strings. This is the most prominent guitar part, but once again, several other guitars play a slightly busier variation and don't always sound the open first and second strings.

JEFF BUCKLEY GRACE Middle (part 1) **BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO**



Play bars 1 to 4 with a 'down, up, up, down' strumming pattern. This is the best way to lock in with the 6/8 groove here. Bars 5 and 8 work best with a 'down, up, up, down, up, up' pattern. If you choose to play the chords in bars 1 to 4 with one finger, make sure you can angle it so as to avoid contact with the first, second and third strings.

JEFF BUCKLEY GRACE Middle (part 2) **BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO**



This is essentially an extended pre-chorus, since the four-bar repeated section is almost identical to the first four bars of the pre-chorus. Thus the same guidelines apply and it should be played with alternate picking in the same loose way.

PASSENGER
LET HER GO

TG takes you through Rockschool's Grade Two arrangement of this 2012 mega-hit!

Let Her Go, Michael Rosenberg's chart-topping second single from the album *All The Little Lights*, was met with critical acclaim after its release, receiving prestigious nominations and awards, and bringing Passenger to the attention of the likes of Jools Holland and acoustic guitar sensation Ed Sheeran. The song's delicately folk-tinged sound features a catchy fingerstyle introduction and some breezy strumming throughout. In this Rockschool Grade Two arrangement, the opening chords (bars 1 to 8) provide rhythmic momentum before the chorus strumming at bar 9. You'll need to experiment with plectrum and fingers in this piece, as the intro, chorus and verse all have slightly different technical requirements. In the opening bars, make sure the open G string rings clearly, particularly under the Dadd11 in bar 2. With the chorus chords that follow, the suggested picking direction markings will help to keep your strumming arm aligned with the varying half note (minim), quarter note (crotchet) and eighth note (quaver) rhythms.

RSL Awarding the Contemporary Arts

Whether you're taking your first steps on guitar or moving into further/higher education, a Rockschool Grade will improve your playing ability whilst you learn iconic tracks from the world of popular music. For more info visit: www.rslawards.com

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LET HER GO
Words and Music by Michael David Rosenberg
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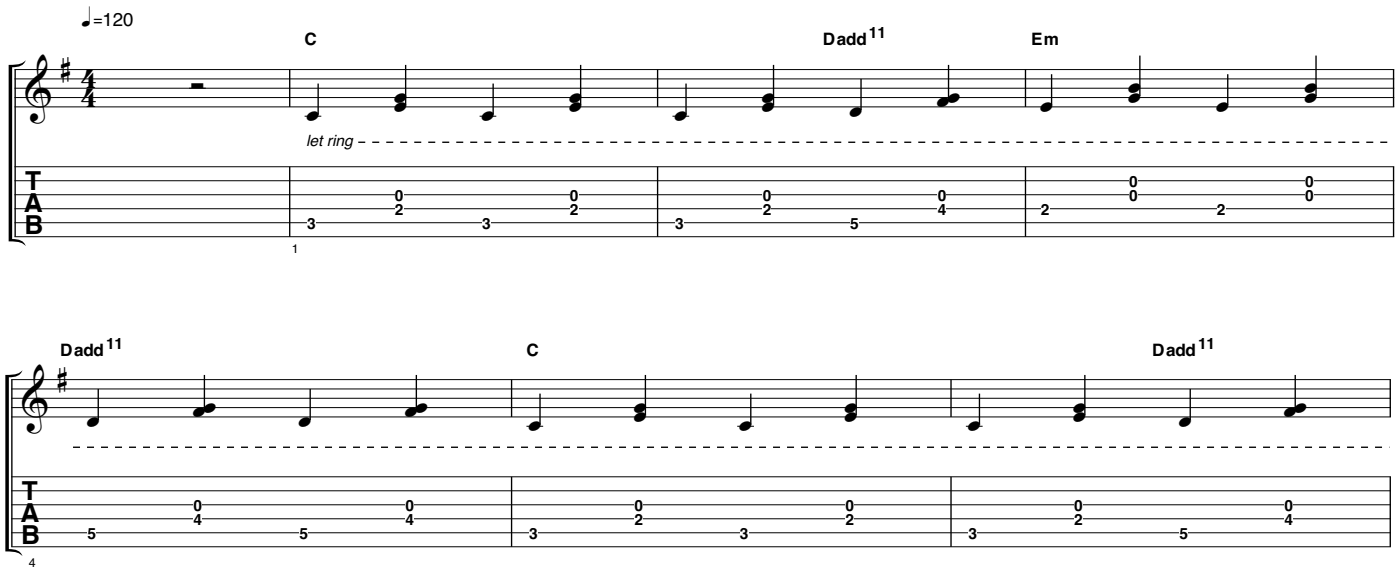
PASSENGER LET HER GO — **BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO**



Words Jono Harrison Photo Getty

PASSENGER LET HER GO **BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO**

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At this tempo, you'll need to be efficient with your fretting-hand chord changes in the two choruses (bars 9 to 16, and 25 to 32). Also, watch out for the shift from the D chord to faster eighth note melodic work on single strings in the verse (from bar 16 onwards). Here, try to use one finger per fret in 1st position. You can shift upwards for the F♯ note that opens bar 20 if you need to.

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LYNYRD SKYNYRD
SIMPLE MAN

It's a case of less is more in this laid back classic from the pioneers of Southern rock

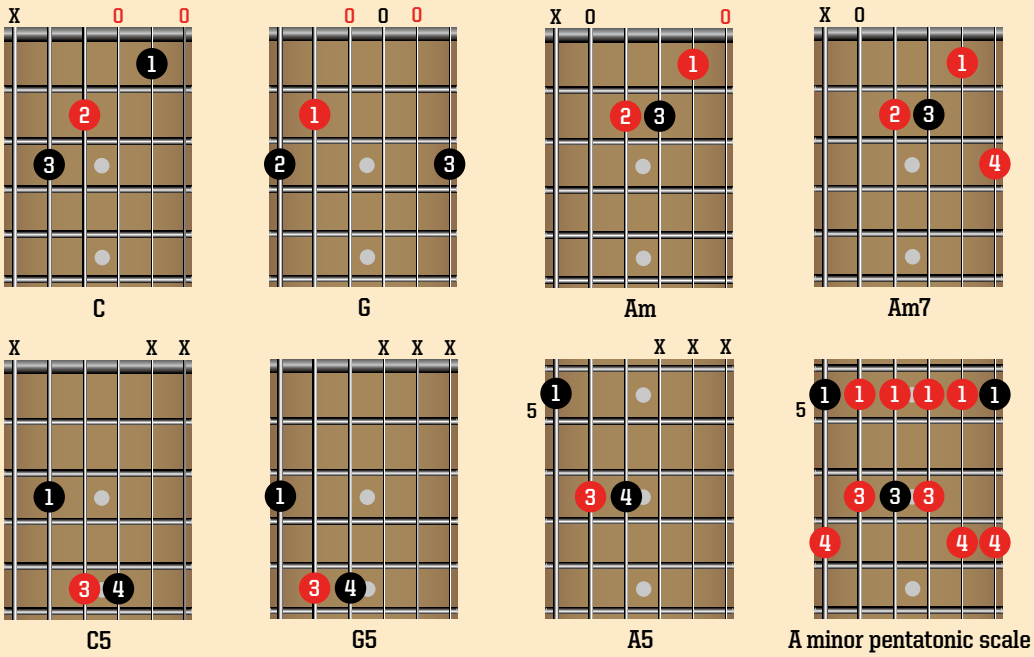
Featuring on Lynyrd Skynyrd's self-titled debut album of 1973, *Simple Man* is one of the band's most popular songs, and a favourite in their live set to this day. The song illustrates the band's 'keep it simple' approach to writing and recording, undoubtedly a big part of the reason why their back catalogue still sounds fresh and exciting nearly five decades on.

Like many of their tunes, the main riff (which we've tabbed below) is based on easy open shapes played with a simple but effective 'down-up' picking pattern. Add a cool riff in the interlude (also tabbed), powerchords to drive the chorus, plus a great solo (no, this one's not as long as *Freebird*!) and you have the basic formula for Skynyrd's inimitable Southern rock style. We don't have room to tab the solo, but we have included a handy scale boxout to get you started and rocking out over our backing track.

Also note that the original track was recorded in E♭ tuning (i.e., all six strings dropped a half step) but we've recorded our version in standard tuning.

CHORDS

When you're picking the notes of the main riff you won't need to fret the first string of the G chord – and this makes changes easier. Am7 is a simple finger change to Am. The chorus powerchords can be played as shown or as easy two-note diads by omitting the highest note. Just be sure to mute those idle open strings. The A minor pentatonic scale is used in the solo from 3:35, both in 5th position and an octave higher in 17th position. Try to follow the chords in the first two bars. I.e., bend the third string up by a tone at the 7th fret over the C chord, then release the bend for the G chord in the following bar. Don't get too hung up on the theory, though, and let your ears decide what works.



SIMPLE MAN
Words and Music by Ronnie Van Zant and Gary Rossington
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Guitars and backing Phil Capone. Photo Gary Rossington/Allen Collins

BACKING TRACK (BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO)
This song comes with a full backing track. Enter the above link into your web browser of choice; press play and jam along, guitaraoke style!

SONGSHEET

Simple Man

Intro
C / / / G / / / Am / / / Am7 / / / x4

Verse 1
C G Am
Mama told me when I was young
C G Am
Come sit beside me, my only son
C G Am
And listen closely to what I say
C G
And if you do this it'll help you
Am
Some sunny day, ah yeah

Interlude riff

Verse 2
C G Am
Oh take your time, don't live too fast
C G Am
Troubles will come and they will pass
C G Am
Go find a woman yeah and you'll find love
C
And don't forget son
G Am
There is someone up above

Chorus
C G Am
And be a simple kind of man
C G Am
Oh, be something you love and understand
C G Am
Baby, be a simple kind of man
C G Am
Oh, won't you do this for me son if you can

Interlude
C / / / G / / / Am / / / / / / /

Verse 3
C G Am
Forget your lust for the rich man's gold
C G Am
All that you need is in your soul
C G Am
And you can do this oh baby if you try
C G
All that I want for you my son
Am
Is to be satisfied

Repeat Chorus

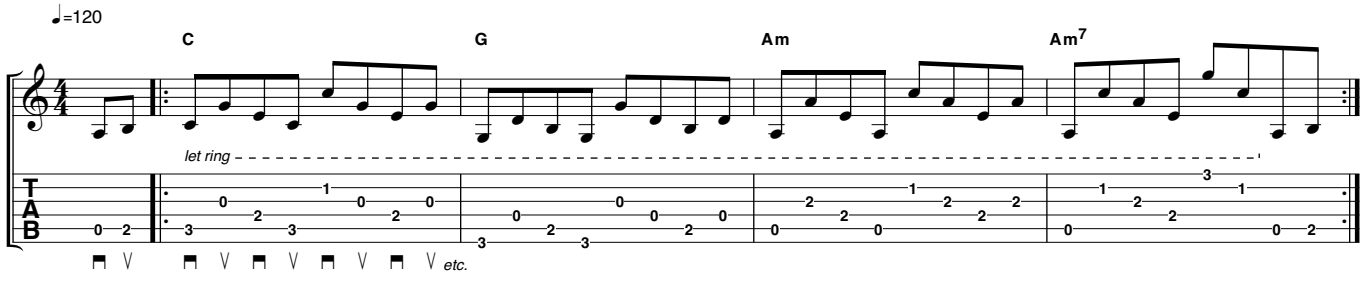
Guitar solo
C / / / G / / / Am / / / / / / / x5

Interlude riff

Verse 4
C G Am
Oh don't you worry, you'll find yourself
C G Am
Follow your heart and nothing else
C G Am
And you can do this oh baby if you try
C G
All that I want for you my son
Am
Is to be satisfied

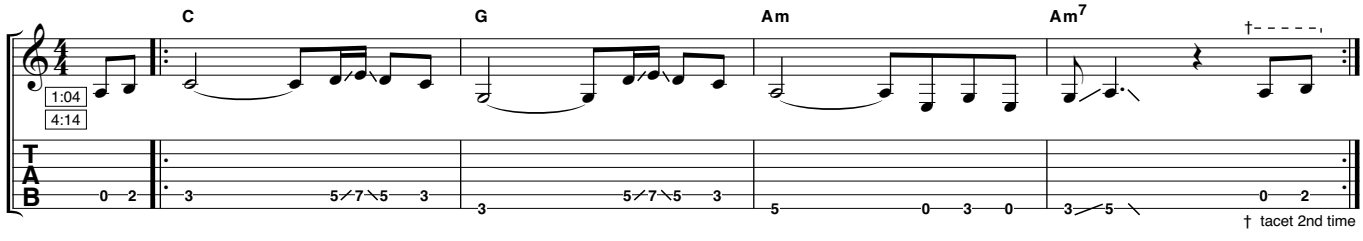
Repeat Chorus & Fade Out

LYNYRD SKYNYRD SIMPLE MAN Intro/Verse riff **BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO**



Repeat this riff throughout each verse. Hold the chords down throughout; there's an open string at the end of bars 1 and 2 which facilitates the changes. Use the picking shown under the tab for a confident delivery. Notice how the picking pattern for C is repeated on the lower set of strings for G, and, then on the same strings, for Am.

LYNYRD SKYNYRD SIMPLE MAN Interlude riff **BIT.LY/TG361AUDIO**

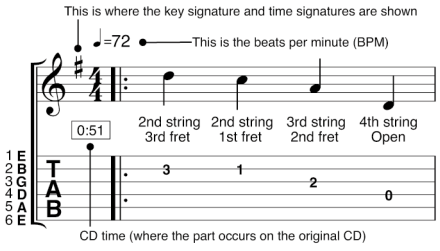


This riff is played *along* the strings to enable those slides on the fifth string up to the 7th fret. Use your third finger for the slide, this makes it easier to play the low G (bar 2, beat 1) and low A (bar 3, beat 1) with your first finger. Use an overdriven tone here but don't saturate it with too much distortion or you'll lose clarity and groove.

TAB GUIDE

Get more from TG by understanding our easy-to-follow musical terms and signs

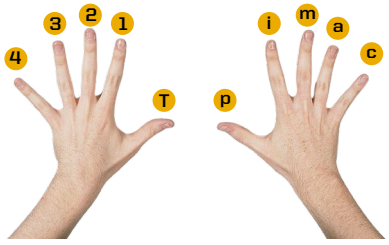
What is tab?



Tab is short for tablature, a notational system used to give detailed information as to where notes should be played on the fretboard. Tab appears underneath conventional music notation as six horizontal lines that represent the strings of the guitar, from the sixth (thick) string at the bottom to the first (thin) string at the top. On these lines, numbers represent which frets you place your fingers. For example, an A note on the 2nd fret, third string, will be shown as a number '2' on the third line down on the tab. Unfretted strings are shown with a 'o'. The key and time signatures are shown in the notation. TG also includes a timestamp to tell you where in the original track you'll find each example and tempo expressed in beats per minute.

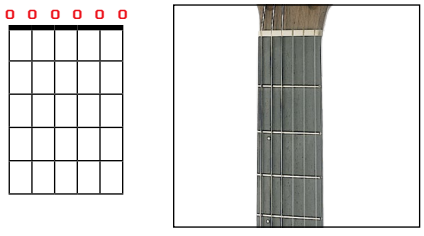
FRET BOXES: CHORDS, SCALES AND CAPO NOTATION

HAND LABELLING



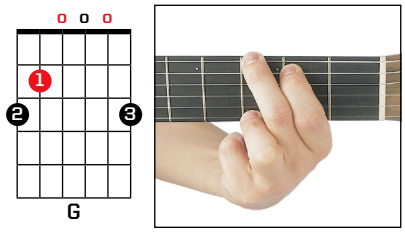
Here are the abbreviations used for each finger. Fretting hand: **1, 2, 3, 4, (T)** Picking hand: **p (thumb), i (index), m (middle), a (annular), c (little finger)**

NUT AND FRETBOARD



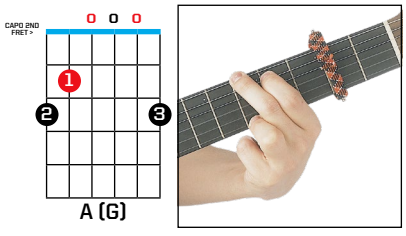
This fretbox diagram represents the guitar's fretboard exactly, as seen in the photo. This design is used for ease of visualising a fretboard scale or chord quickly.

CHORD EXAMPLE



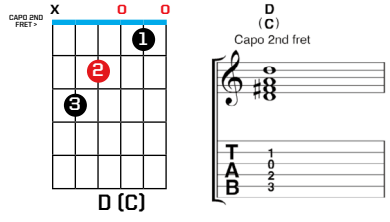
This diagram represents a G chord. The 'o's are open strings, and a circled number is a fretting hand finger. A black 'o' or circled number is the root note (here, G).

CAPO EXAMPLE



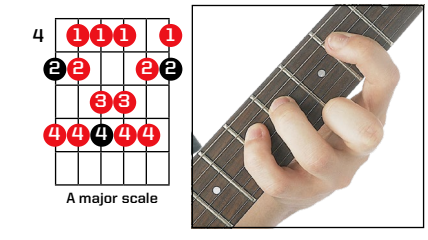
The blue line in the diagram represents a capo – for this A chord, place it at the 2nd fret. Capos change the fret number ordering. Here, the original 5th fret now becomes the 3rd fret, 7th fret now 5th fret, etc.

CAPO NOTATION



Here the chord looks like a C in the tab, but the capo on the 2nd fret raises the pitch to make it a D. The 2nd fret capo'd notes are shown with a '0' in the tab as if they were open strings.

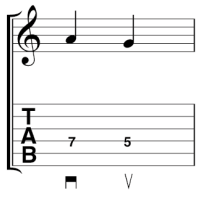
SCALE EXAMPLE



The fret box diagram illustrates the fret hand fingering for the A major scale using black dots for root notes and red dots for other scale tones. The photo shows part of the scale being played on the fourth string with the first, third and fourth fingers.

GUITAR TECHNIQUES: PICKING

DOWN AND UP-PICKING

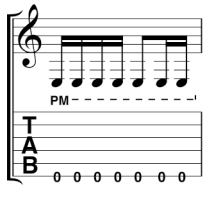


The symbols under the tab tell you the first note is to be down-picked and the second note is to be up-picked.

TREMOLO PICKING

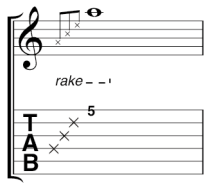
Each of the four notes are to be alternate-picked (down and up-picked) very rapidly and continuously.

PALM MUTING



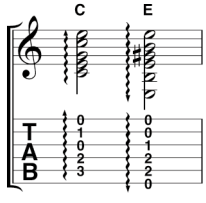
Palm-mute by resting the edge of your picking hand palm on the strings near the bridge saddles.

PICK RAKE



Drag the pick across the strings shown with a single sweep. This is often used to augment a rake's last note.

APPREGGIATED CHORD



Play the notes of the chord by strumming across the relevant strings in the direction of the arrow head.

FRETTING HAND

HAMMER-ON & PULL-OFF

Pick the first note then hammer down on the string for the second note. Pick the third note and pull-off for the fourth note.

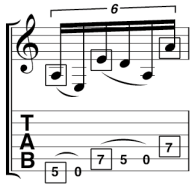
NOTE TRILLS

After picking the first note, rapidly alternate between the two notes shown in brackets using hammer-ons and pull-offs.

SLIDES (GLISSANDO)

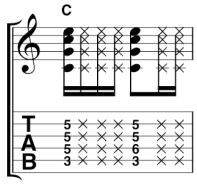
Pick the first note and then slide to the next. For the last two notes pick the first, slide to the next and then re-pick it (RP).

FRET-HAND TAPPING



Sound the notes marked with a square by hammering-on/tapping with your fret hand fingers, instead of picking.

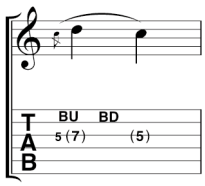
FRET-HAND MUTING



X markings represent notes and strings that are muted by your fret hand when struck by your picking hand.

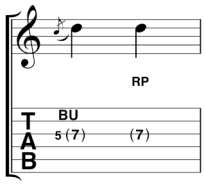
BENDING AND VIBRATO

BEND AND RELEASE



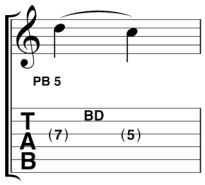
Fret the first note (here, the 5th fret) and bend up to the pitch of the bracketed note, before releasing again.

RE-PICKED BEND



Bend up to the pitch shown in the brackets, then re-pick the note while holding the bent note at the pitch shown.

PRE-BEND

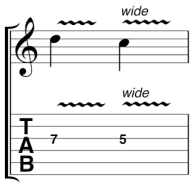


Silently bend the string up from the 5th fret (PB5) to the pitch of the 7th fret note, pick it and release to the 5th fret note.

QUARTER-TONE BEND

Pick the note then bend up a quarter-tone (a very small amount). This is sometimes referred to as a 'blues curl'.

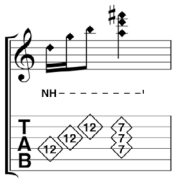
VIBRATO



Your fretting hand vibrates the string by small bend-ups and releases. Exaggerate this effect to create a 'wide' vibrato.

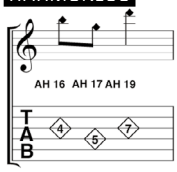
HARMONICS

NATURAL HARMONICS



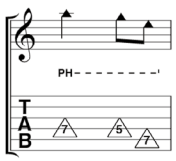
Pick the note while lightly touching the string directly over the fret indicated. A chiming harmonic results.

ARTIFICIAL HARMONICS



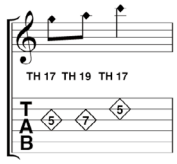
Fret the note as shown, then lightly place your index finger directly over 'x' fret (AH'x') and pick (with a pick, p or a).

PINCHED HARMONICS



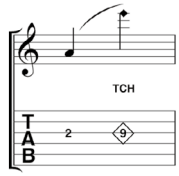
After fretting the note in the triangle, dig into the string with the side of your thumb as you sound it with the pick.

TAPPED HARMONICS



Place your finger on the note as shown, but sound it with a quick pick hand tap at the fret shown (TH17) for a harmonic.

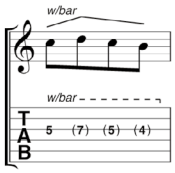
TOUCHED HARMONICS



A previously sounded note is touched above the fret marked TCH (eg, TCH 9) for it to sound a harmonic.

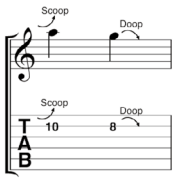
VIBRATO BAR / WHAMMY BAR

WHAMMY BAR BENDS



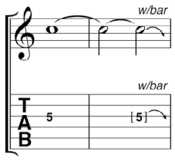
The note is picked as shown, then the vibrato bar is raised and lowered to the pitches shown in brackets.

SCOOP AND DOOP



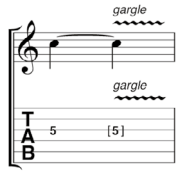
Scoop: depress the bar just before striking the note and release. Doop: lower the bar slightly after picking note.

SUSTAINED NOTE AND DIVEBOMB



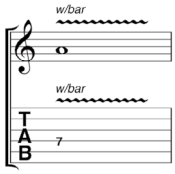
A Note is sustained then the vibrato bar is depressed to slack. The square bracket indicates a further articulation.

GARGLE



Sound the note and 'flick' the vibrato bar with your picking hand so it 'quivers'. This results in a 'gargling' sound!

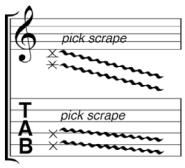
WHAMMY BAR VIBRATO



Gently rock the whammy bar to repeatedly bend the pitch up and down. This sounds similar to fret hand vibrato.

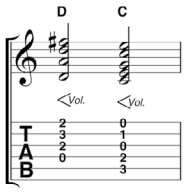
OTHERS

PICK SCRAPE



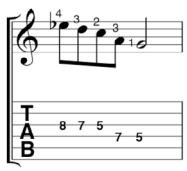
The edge of the pick is dragged either down or up along the lower strings to produce a scraped sound.

VIOLINING



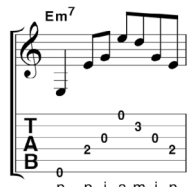
Turn the volume control down, sound the note(s) and then turn the volume up for a smooth fade in.

FINGER NUMBERING



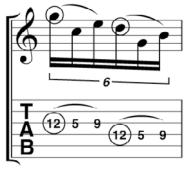
The numbers in the traditional notation refer to the fingers required to play each note.

PIMA DIRECTIONS



Any kind of fingerpicking requirements are shown at the bottom of the tab notation.

PICK HAND TAPPING



Tap (hammer-on) with a finger of your picking hand onto the fret marked with a circle. Usually with 'i' or 'm'.

THE GAS STATION

REAL WORLD REVIEWS OF THE BEST NEW GEAR

Welcome to the GAS (Gear Acquisition Syndrome*) Station! Every issue, TG scours the market for the hottest new gear and brings you transparent reviews that you can trust. From the smallest of accessories that make your life easier, to big investments, such as brand new guitars, amps and effects pedals – if it's worth your attention, you'll find it here!

HOW WE TEST

CURATION
Our product selection is driven by our love of gear. We select the most exciting products on the market every month to bring you opinions you can trust.

FACE-VALUE REVIEWS
We're not gear snobs here at *Total Guitar*. We judge it on whether it looks good, sounds good and plays well – not by the name on the headstock.

***WHAT IS GAS?**
Gear Acquisition Syndrome is the guitar-player's never-ending urge to acquire new gear, irrespective of whether they actually need it. Don't pretend you don't have it – we all do!

NO SNAKE OIL
You won't find us getting hung up on hokey mythology or nonsense marketing speak: we aim to bring you bullsh*t-free opinions on the gear you're interested in.

WE CAN'T BE BOUGHT
TG review scores are a true reflection of our experts' opinion on the product they've been testing. You'll never find a rating in our mag that has been bought and paid for.

REAL WORLD REVIEWS
We test every product under the conditions that they were designed for. For example, if an amp is designed to be played loud, rest assured that we'll have tested it at rehearsal/gig volumes!

BEST BUY AWARD
TG Best Buy Awards are reserved for stand-out products that earn a 4.5 star overall rating. This is the most exciting new gear that you *need* to check out

Total Guitar BEST BUY AWARD

PLATINUM AWARD
Reserved for the very best of the best, TG's Platinum Awards are given to class-leading, gamechanging products that score a maximum 5 stars in every category.

Total Guitar PLATINUM AWARD

★★★★★ SUPERB, A BEST BUY
★★★★½ EXCELLENT
★★★½☆ ABOVE AVERAGE KIT
★★½☆☆ SOME ISSUES
★½☆☆☆ POOR

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The lightest 50-watt valve amps in the world?

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PRS's SE start-up gets a makeover

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Submerge in a sea of classic reverb

START ME UP!

Five awesome new products to get your gear engine revving this month...

STRYMON V2 PEDALS

1 Six of Strymon's classic pedals are getting well-deserved updates with all but the Flint reverb/tremolo getting two additional control knobs to reflect some of the additional functionality here, including new algorithms. All now feature bi-directional MIDI control (for program and CC changes) via a TRS jack and JFET input for improved tone and feel, a mono/stereo input switch and an up-to-date USB-C jack. The bad news is they all cost more than before.

£359
www.strymon.net

PITCHSLAP

2 "It's always seemed odd to me that we tend to only take two measurements when we set guitar intonation, often the open string and 12th fret," says PitchSlap designer Simon Asker. This leaves the process open to errors and we know that if the intonation is out the guitar is never going to sound great. His new iOS app aims to address that by taking the average of all the frets.

£ Free
Apple App Store

FENDER AMPERSTAND

3 How many of us have leaned our guitars on our amps at home or rehearsal? And how many times have they ended up being knocked over? Take the risk out of the equation with this handy solution, and it even holds your picks, capo or a drink, too! The micro-suction material used for the cable will attach to amplifier tolex, or most table tops. The grooves on either side can also be used to hold your guitar cable in place.

£16.99
www.fender.com

OLD BLOOD NOISE ENDEAVOURS SCREEN VIOLENCE

4 A true collaboration between artists and pedal maker that reflects the synth/guitar melding of the Scottish band's sound, member Martin Doherty uses stompboxes for both roles, and this one reflects the sounds that became a 'backbone' on the album of the same name. It features distortion (the Violence side), modulation and reverb that can be blended, allowing all kinds of controlled chaos to emerge.

$279
www.oldbloodnoise.com

WAMPLER METAVERSE

5 Brian Wampler is not messing around here; this could be every delay sound you need in one box. Eleven types of classic and contemporary with full MIDI control and optional expression pedal input. From the Boss DM-2 analogue delay style algorithm to the Bucket Brigade's Delay Memory Man Deluxe stylings alongside TC 2290 and Space Echo tributes, there's iconic sounds to be found, but also Wampler's own Ethereal Delay and its experimental Doctor are here, too.

£349
www.wamplerpedals.com

SHEERAN BY LOWDEN EQUALS EDITION

£995

Total Guitar BEST BUY AWARD

Ed's secret weapon!

As befits one of the biggest-selling artists of recent times, Ed Sheeran doesn't just have a single signature guitar: he has a whole range! But Ed's a pop artist you moan, why on earth would we be interested?

The answer to that lies in the title: Sheeran by Lowden. If you didn't know, George Lowden is unquestionably one of the world's top acoustic guitar makers – and has been for many decades. While the Sheeran range pares down the ingredients and design, what you're getting here is a stage-ready electro-acoustic built to the same exacting standards as a pucker Lowden for a fraction of the price. And it's not made in a hurry in the far east either. No, these guitars are made at Lowden HQ in County Down, Northern Ireland. Interested now?

Our Equals Edition model here is a 3,000-only limited run, but aside from a few details like the '=' inlay at the 7th fret, laser butterfly flourishes on the heel cap and truss rod cover, and a unique to this model inner label, it's exactly the same as the standard W-04 (which will cost you £90 less), the smallest of two body sizes currently offered. It's based on the full-blown Wee Lowden, the smallest guitar in their range, which uses a 24" (610mm) scale length, the same as a Fender Jaguar if you want an electric comparison. Yes, a few pounds shy of a grand ain't cheap in anyone's book, but the Sheeran by Lowden range kicks off with the acoustic-only cedar/walnut W-01 at £655 which like all the models in the range comes with a sturdy gigbag included.

It comes across as a very functional, purposeful and road-ready instrument with zero bling or unnecessary features. The top is solid Sitka spruce while the figured walnut back and sides are actually a five-piece walnut and mahogany lamination. Edge binding is deemed unnecessary. But the neck is high-quality quarter-sawn mahogany, one piece save for an added heel stack, while the fingerboard, bridge and headstock facing are a dark brown ebony. Despite the far lower price than a full-blown Lowden, these Sheeran guitars use the same finish which starts off as gloss but is cut-back by hand to the super smooth satin we see here. A finish like this means there's nowhere to hide: no sunbursting or translucent colours to mask shoddy sanding or file marks.

> "SUPERB UK CRAFT WITH SOUNDS TO MATCH..."

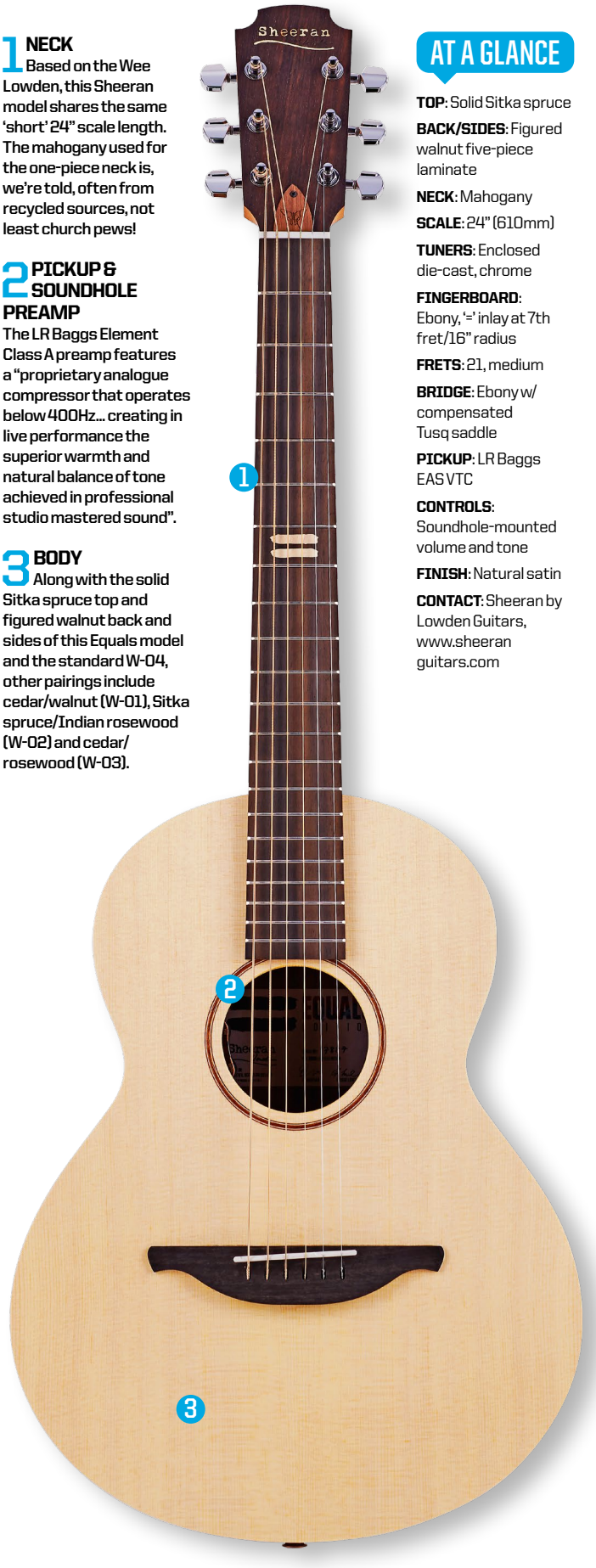
The crisp, clean craft continues to the fretwork that uses a medium gauge wire superbly installed on the acoustic-standard 16" radius fingerboard. It actually feels quite electric guitar-like, the 'C' profile quite full in the hand with a nut width of 43.6mm and a string spacing of 36mm which splays out to 54.5mm at the bridge.

While the .012-.053" gauge strings are probably bigger than most electric players use, the shorter scale here gives a pretty slinky and bend-friendly feel, and you certainly don't have to stick to 1st-position cowboy chords. The combination of the compact

1 NECK
Based on the Wee Lowden, this Sheeran model shares the same 'short' 24" scale length. The mahogany used for the one-piece neck is, we're told, often from recycled sources, not least church pews!

2 PICKUP & SOUNDHOLE PREAMP
The LR Baggs Element Class A preamp features a "proprietary analogue compressor that operates below 400Hz... creating in live performance the superior warmth and natural balance of tone achieved in professional studio mastered sound".

3 BODY
Along with the solid Sitka spruce top and figured walnut back and sides of this Equals model and the standard W-04, other pairings include cedar/walnut (W-01), Sitka spruce/Indian rosewood (W-02) and cedar/rosewood (W-03).



AT A GLANCE

TOP: Solid Sitka spruce

BACK/SIDES: Figured walnut five-piece laminate

NECK: Mahogany

SCALE: 24" (610mm)

TUNERS: Enclosed die-cast, chrome

FINGERBOARD: Ebony, '=' inlay at 7th fret/16" radius

FRETS: 21, medium

BRIDGE: Ebony w/ compensated Tusq saddle

PICKUP: LR Baggs EAS VTC

CONTROLS: Soundhole-mounted volume and tone

FINISH: Natural satin

CONTACT: Sheeran by Lowden Guitars, www.sheeranguitars.com

Photography Phil Barker

How Sheeran met Lowden

An odd pairing with a rock star match-maker

It's handy for even megastars to have their rockstar mates. When Ed Sheeran mentioned to Snow Patrol's Gary Lightbody that he fancied trying a Lowden guitar, he loaned him his own Bushmills limited model from 2012. It proved handy as Ed used it to write five songs for his huge-selling *X* album. Gary then asked George Lowden if he'd make a guitar for him to give to Ed and instead of gift-wrapping a standard model, rather shrewdly, George set about designing a small-bodied guitar that became the Wee Lowden. One thing led to another and before long the Sheeran by Lowden range was conceived, aiming to deliver high-quality guitars that kept the retail price under £1000.

size and scale length makes a lot of sense for the practising musician – a full-size dreadnought feels huge in comparison – but if you think you're going to be short changed in the sound department, think again. While you don't get that big low-end of a dreadnought, there's a well-balanced depth here that makes for a rather good recording guitar too – almost as if it's been pre-EQ'd.

When you want to plug in, again you'll be in for a treat. LR Baggs don't mess about, and the discrete Element electro system here with its soundhole-placed mini-preamp with volume and tone controls is the perfect partner. Along with a flexible film undersaddle sensor there's some tricky stuff going on in that preamp, too, and plugged into an acoustic amp or bigger PA, it sounds much bigger than its size suggests, with little piezo 'quack'. It's a very credible electro-acoustic sound indeed.

Aside from being very fashionable, small body guitars make for great travel or house guitars but when they're made as well as this, with an excellent electro system and almost electric guitar-like playability, you have to question why you still bash away on your dreadnought. Superb UK craft with sounds to match. Thanks Ed – oh, and George!

Dave Burrluck

> "IT BOASTS ALMOST ELECTRIC GUITAR-LIKE PLAYABILITY"

SUMMARY	
FEATURES	★★★★½
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★½
BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★
USABILITY	★★★★★
OVERALL RATING	★★★★½

ALSO TRY...

TAYLOR GS-MINI-E £499

Made in Taylor's Mexican factory, the GS-Mini is a down-sized Grand Auditorium with a 23.5" scale and optional Taylor ES-B electro system. It comes in three solid top/layered back and sides wood combinations and includes a gigbag.

PRS SE P20E £529

This Chinese-made small body 'parlour' electro is typically detailed and comes with a 24.72" scale length, a solid mahogany top, Fishman Sonitone electro system, a choice of three colours and a gigbag.

AUDEN NEO EMILY ROSE FULL BODY £849

With body shells made in China and hand-finishing in the UK, Auden has made a name for affordable quality. This is an all-solid cedar/mahogany acoustic parlour (pickup system from £100).

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TOTAL Guitar

Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Phil Barker

BLACKSTAR ST. JAMES EL34 COMBO AND 6L6 HEAD

TG checks out a pair of lightweight valve amps from Blackstar...

Valve guitar amplifiers are portable if you only need a few watts for home practice, however if you want an amp to take around the world and play on any size of stage, it needs to be bigger and that means heavier – often a lot heavier. We've grown used to this over the years, however, let's be honest, bulky 4x12 cabinets and 30kg-plus combos are only fun to use if someone else carries them around for you. Does it have to be that way today? Blackstar think not and they've just announced a new range claimed to be the world's lightest 50-watt all-valve amplifiers. Meet the St. James. Named for the district that's the heart of Northampton, Blackstar Amplification's home town, the St. James amps are available in two distinctly different flavours: a medium gain preamp with an EL34-based output stage that's inspired by classic British designs from the early 1960s, and a more contemporary high gain preamp combined with a 6L6 output stage.

BLACKSTAR
INPUT
VOLUME I
GAIN II
VOLUME II
BASS
MIDDLE
TREBLE
REVERB
MASTER
STBY
POWER
ST. JAMES
BLACKSTAR

The St. James's retro-modern cabinets have plenty of 'I want' appeal, with fawn vinyl and a dark speaker grille for the EL34 amp and black vinyl with a light grey grille for the 6L6 version. As we've come to expect from Blackstar, the standard of finish is very high, with cool piping details and an illuminated logo, which doubles as a 'power on' indicator. Underneath the vinyl you'll find candlenut plywood, which is lightweight and resonant, making it a great choice for guitar speaker enclosures.

A closer look at the chassis reveals more innovation, including a custom-designed patent-pending switched mode power supply. This replaces the mains transformer, one of the heaviest components in a conventional valve amp and the chief source of mains hum. Replacing this weighty lump of copper and iron also gives the St. James universal voltage compatibility – you can plug it into a wall outlet anywhere in the world without needing to change fiddly switches. The speaker output transformer is still there, but substantially reduced in size and weight, thanks to new technologies.

The St. James's exclusive Celestion Zephyr loudspeaker is another Blackstar first, using groundbreaking design to reproduce the sounds of the iconic Vintage 30 driver at a fraction of the weight, with a ferrite (not neodymium) motor. Inside the chassis, the St. James's electronics sit on several high quality printed circuit boards, joined with heavy-duty Molex connectors. In the centre of the main PCB there's an integrated reactive load (basically a coneless loudspeaker), which emulates the loudspeaker's complex dynamic behaviour for a true 'amp in the room' feel. Overall, the internal layout is neat and robust, built to last.

Both St. James amps have straightforward control panels, which are easy to navigate, with clear graphics and funky vintage radiogram-inspired knobs. Features are the same for both amps; a single input feeding two independent preamp channels, with volume for the clean channel and an extra gain control for the overdrive channel. There are EQ controls for bass, mid and treble, with a global master volume and reverb level. A small toggle switch drops the St. James's output power from a full-on 50 watts to a studio-friendly two watts, with a second 50-watt option called 'Sag', which emulates the dynamic response of a small amp power supply pushed to its limit. Two more toggle switches change channels and activate a pre-set boost on the drive channel; these are both replicated on the St. James's two-button footswitch, which is part of the package. The St. James's clever recording solution uses the integrated reactive load to feed Blackstar's excellent Cab Rig simulation software.

This routes simultaneously to three outputs: a balanced XLR, a stereo line out and USB, all of which remain active when the amp's switched into standby mode, for silent recording and quiet stage environments. Black Star's Cab Rig software is accessed through USB using the Architect partner app and provides a practically infinite choice of speaker, cabinet, room and microphone combinations. You can upload three presets into the amps and select from a rear panel switch.

We tried out the St. James with our regular test guitars, and also borrowed a superb 1972 Les Paul Custom for an extended studio session. While both amps have similar controls, there are differences under the hood, with completely separate clean and drive EQ circuits using dual-gang potentiometers. The EL34 version features a USA-style clean channel, while the low-medium gain drive channel gets its inspiration from classic early 1960's British amp designs. The clean channel's EQ is a conventional three-band passive interactive type similar to most Fender 'black panel' amps, while the drive channel EQ has interactive bass and treble teamed with an active mid control that cuts and boosts frequencies. The EL34's output stage is configured to be tight and linear for the clean channel, changing to be looser and more dynamic for the drive channel, which cops JTM45 crunch and AC30 chimes with ease. Activating the 'Voice' function adds a healthy 10dB boost for more aggressive leads. The 6L6 version has a similar clean channel, while the drive channel's interactive three-band EQ is inspired by modern British high gain amplifiers, with a tight, linear power amp setting that becomes looser when the Voice function is activated, emphasising low end 'chug' and increased preamp saturation.

Both amps are equally easy to dial in; the clean channels sound great with single coils and humbuckers, while the drive channels are great with single coils but sounded phenomenally good with punchy, warm humbuckers. The 6L6 lead channel is spectacular, with soaring high gain that clings to notes and holds on to them for unearthly sustain. On stage there's no shortage of power, especially using the head with its matching 2x12 cabinet, while for recording or PA the Cab Rig outputs are perfect, offering quick plug 'n' play emulation.

£1099

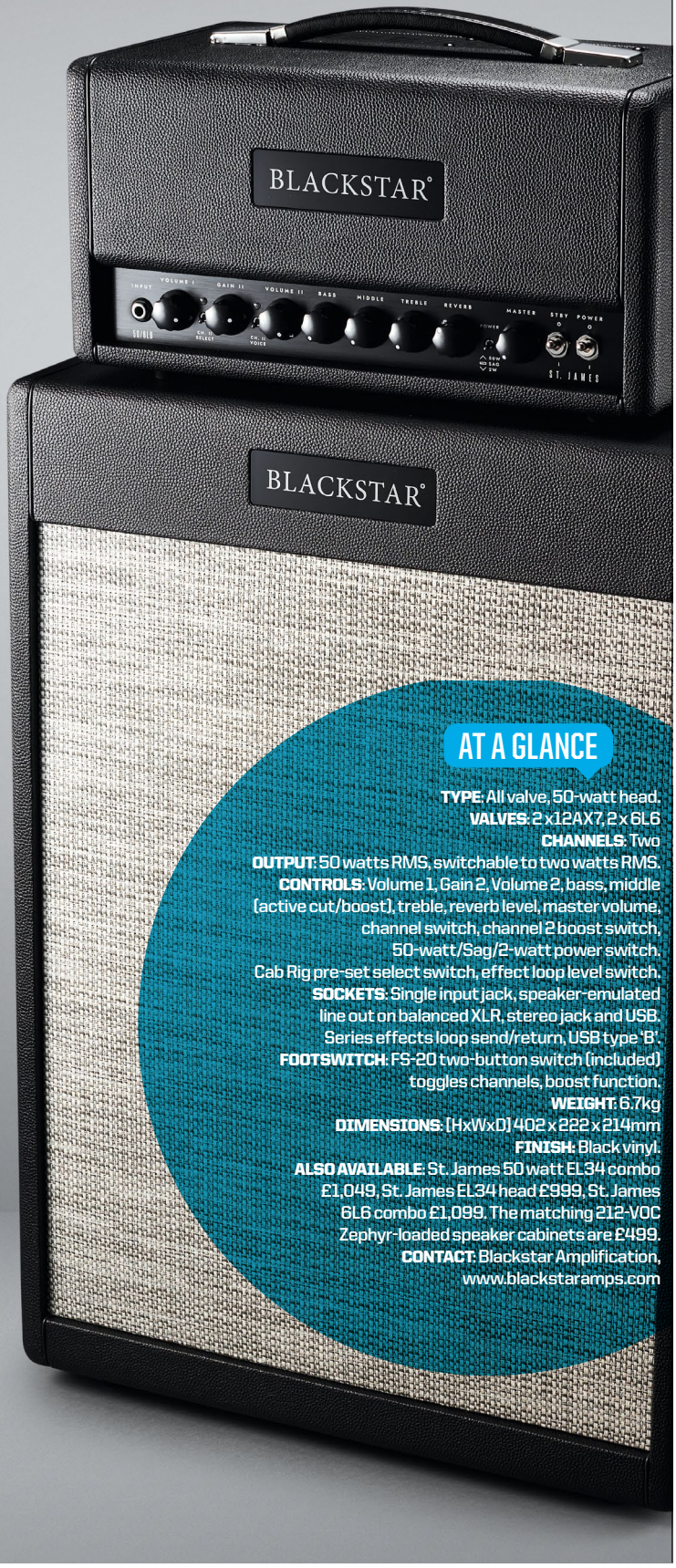
BLACKSTAR ST. JAMES EL34 50 WATT 1X12 COMBO

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: All valve, 50-watt 1x12" combo amp.
VALVES: 2 x 12AX7, 2 x EL34
CHANNELS: Two
OUTPUT: 50 watts RMS, switchable to two watts RMS
CONTROLS: Volume 1, Gain 2, Volume 2, bass, middle (active cut/boost), treble, reverb level, master volume, channel switch, channel 2 boost switch, 50-watt/Sag/2-watt power switch. Cab Rig pre-set select switch, effect loop level switch.
SOCKETS: Single input jack, speaker-emulated line out on balanced XLR, stereo jack and USB. Series effects loop send/return, USB type 'B'.
LOUDSPEAKERS: 1 x 12" Celestion Zephyr G12Z-70
FOOTSWITCH: FS-20 two-button switch (included) toggles channels, boost function.
WEIGHT: 14.5kg
DIMENSIONS: [HxWxD] 462 x 535 x 259mm
FINISH: Fawn vinyl with black jute speaker grille.
ALSO AVAILABLE: St. James 50 watt 6L6 combo £1,049, St. James EL34 head £999, St. James 6L6 head £1,099. The matching 212-VOC Zephyr-loaded speaker cabinets are £499.
CONTACT: Blackstar Amplification, www.blackstaramps.com

£999

BLACKSTAR ST. JAMES 6L6 50 WATT 1X12 HEAD



AT A GLANCE

TYPE: All valve, 50-watt head.
VALVES: 2 x 12AX7, 2 x 6L6
CHANNELS: Two
OUTPUT: 50 watts RMS, switchable to two watts RMS.
CONTROLS: Volume 1, Gain 2, Volume 2, bass, middle (active cut/boost), treble, reverb level, master volume, channel switch, channel 2 boost switch, 50-watt/Sag/2-watt power switch. Cab Rig pre-set select switch, effect loop level switch.
SOCKETS: Single input jack, speaker-emulated line out on balanced XLR, stereo jack and USB. Series effects loop send/return, USB type 'B'.
FOOTSWITCH: FS-20 two-button switch (included) toggles channels, boost function.
WEIGHT: 6.7kg
DIMENSIONS: [HxWxD] 402 x 222 x 214mm
FINISH: Black vinyl.
ALSO AVAILABLE: St. James 50 watt EL34 combo £1,049, St. James EL34 head £999, St. James 6L6 combo £1,099. The matching 212-VOC Zephyr-loaded speaker cabinets are £499.
CONTACT: Blackstar Amplification, www.blackstaramps.com

FINAL VERDICT

Which of these signatures is a must-have?

Blackstar claim the St. James's are 'the lightest 50-watt valve amps in the world' and the weight of the new amps – or lack of it – is an almost shocking revelation. Beside this, there's plenty of innovative design, pro-standard low noise performance and seriously brilliant tone. In fact, both flavours of the St. James sound so good, you might have a tricky time deciding which is right for you. If pedals, classic rock and blues are your thing, we'd suggest the EL34 version, where the lower gain preamp flatters that more nuanced style of playing. If you want to rock – and we mean really rock, then the 6L6 version has your name on it. Especially with humbuckers, we think this amp has possibly the best lead channel of any Blackstar. Blackstar have a reputation for producing great value for money products and the St. James amps are no exception, despite being at the top end of what most folks might class affordable. Aimed at professionals and serious amateurs, they're potential game changers – check them out now.

BLACKSTAR ST. JAMES EL34 50 WATT 1X12 COMBO

Total Guitar BEST BUY AWARD

BLACKSTAR ST. JAMES 6L6 50 WATT 1X12 HEAD

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PRS SE STANDARD 24-08

£620

Total Guitar PLATINUM AWARD

PRS's SE start-up gets a makeover

In original PRS-speak, 'Standard' typically refers to an all mahogany body and 'Custom' is used when a figured maple top is added – the reverse of Gibson's Les Paul designations. It makes sense of course and dates back to PRS's original 25" scale, 24-fret guitars.

Some 37 years on, Standards only appear in the USA-made S2 line and here in the Indonesian-made SE range. In fact, the start-up SE Standard kicks off the entire PRS electric canon at £590. This new 24-08 version, like the previous SE and Core USA Custom versions, introduces two discrete mini-toggle switches that offer eight sound selections compared to the six of that start-up Standard, hence the name.

If that was this guitar's only USP then you might be wondering why we're reviewing it. Trust us, it's not. Nearly four decades of guitar-making at the highest level is distilled here into quite a *tour de force*. The now classic PRS platform looks just as elegant as it did all those years ago. Yes, the top carve isn't quite as dished as the USA Core models but in the relatively new 'shallow violin' carve here, it narrows the gap. That top edge is bound too and the deep blue is semi-translucent. The 24-fret SE's use a three-piece maple neck construction to ensure rigidity and stability, the bound-edge fingerboard is a dark brown rosewood that shows off those bird inlays – pretty much the only decoration here.

Not every guitar we get to play at this price is quite gig-fit. This one seriously is. It's a great weight at 7.4lbs (3.4kg) for starters, the wide thin neck profile is very mainstream (though not shred-like thin in depth); the fretting from pretty much PRS's usual medium jumbo gauge is faultless on the usual 10" radius fingerboard and the friction-reducing nut is perfectly cut. It damn near plays itself! The vibrato is very in-tune so long as you stretch your strings: it's a very stable guitar.

If you're waiting for the but, sorry, there isn't one. In true single coil mode the slug coils of each pickup don't quite capture the fullness of the SE Silver Sky's pickups but they do a great 'Fender', avoiding sounding over-thin or over-bright. The slightly hot vintage-style bridge humbucker adds thickness but not a huge volume leap with a balanced and not over mid-heavy voicing that covers huge ground. The neck is almost too Santana-smooth and in fact both pickups benefit from a little volume reduction certainly if you're chasing more retro tones. Not everyone uses their volume and tone controls but here for lightening those 'buckers or slightly rounding the single coils they really expand what we're hearing, as they should.

Last year's SE Custom 24-08 was very good; this year's SE Silver Sky nearly broke the internet – again! – but this over-looked and considerably less-expensive SE is far from 'standard'. In fact, it's misnamed: maybe PRS should change it to 'Exceptional'.

Dave Burrluck

SUMMARY	
FEATURES	✪✪✪✪✪
SOUND QUALITY	✪✪✪✪✪
VALUE FOR MONEY	✪✪✪✪✪
BUILD QUALITY	✪✪✪✪✪
PLAYABILITY	✪✪✪✪✪
OVERALL RATING	✪✪✪✪✪

1 VIBRATO
PRS's classic re-design of the Fender vibrato floats parallel to the face of the guitar. This version, also used on the USA-made S2 and CE guitars, is all steel in construction and has a push-in arm with swing tension adjustment.

2 PICKUPS
The 'S' pickups are designed in the USA but made by Cor-Tek's pickup making division, PSE. PRS is tight-lipped about what's inside although the double black bobbins differ from the zebra-coiled 'S' versions of the USA 85/15 humbuckers used on the start-up SE Standard.

3 CONTROLS
While the basic three-way toggle pickup selector with master volume and tone is a setup well used by PRS, each pickup has its own two-way mini-toggle switch to select full humbucking and 'true' single coil.

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Mahogany
NECK: Maple (three-piece), glued-in
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 24, medium
PICKUPS: PRS TCI 'S' Treble and Bass humbuckers
CONTROLS: 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume and tone, two mini-toggle coil split switches
HARDWARE: PRS vibrato (cast), PRS designed non-locking tuners
FINISH: Trans Blue (as reviewed), Tobacco Sunburst
CASE: Gigbag included
CONTACT: PRS, www.prsguitars.com

Photography Phil Barker

FENDER DUAL MARINE LAYER REVERB

£199

Submerge in a sea of classic reverb

Minimalist pedalboard players, look away now – this is probably not the reverb pedal you're looking for. It's a bigger one but it's a simpler proposition than some of the similarly-sized competition. And in a market of experimental reverb algorithms, the Dual Marine Layer is now surprisingly unusual. From its spec the Dual Marine Layer Reverb seems more about simpler pleasures; subtler reverb designed more for real world rhythm and lead work.

It is the follow-up to the Marine Layer; with the Dual indicating two onboard reverbs being selectable this time, with a layer of controls for reverb A and B. There's three types to choose from, but Fender doesn't actually state what 1, 2 and 3 are in the manual. What they sound like to our ears are hall, room and plate (we later find out Fender calls the latter Shimmer, but it doesn't add the high octave decay we associate with that name), so not a huge variation but familiar algorithms based on the tried and true. Even the modulation never pushes things into warbly and queasy places but very appealing for lush clean tones.

The dampening control works as a high end decay cut here for subtler sounds, while the sustain gets a dedicated footswitch too that adds a long tail of decay when it's pressed and held. Nice to have.

> THE QUALITY OF SOUNDS HERE IS UNDENIABLE

We found the dual nature of the pedal to be a great option for having a shorter reverb for general use with a longer, more ambient wash for atmospheric solos. While there's no stereo out and not quite the variety of algorithms you might expect from a larger unit (Fender's Reflecting Pool offers more ambient sounds), the quality of the sounds here for everyday reverb needs, especially live use, is undeniable, alongside a superb build quality that's become a hallmark for Fender effects. Plus, the optional blue LEDs on the control knobs add some pizzaz to your pedalboard!

Rob Laing

SUMMARY

FEATURES	★★★★½
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★½
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★☆
BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★
USABILITY	★★★★★
OVERALL RATING	★★★★½

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: Two-channel reverb pedal

CONTROLS: 2x Damping, 2x Time, 2x Mod, 2x level, Sustain, Type switch, Bypass footswitch, momentary Sustain footswitch, LEDs on/off

SOCKETS: Input, output, power

BYPASS: True bypass

POWER: 9V DC centre-negative

CONTACT: www.fender.com

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Words Ellie Rogers **Photo** Frances Carter

THE BETHS

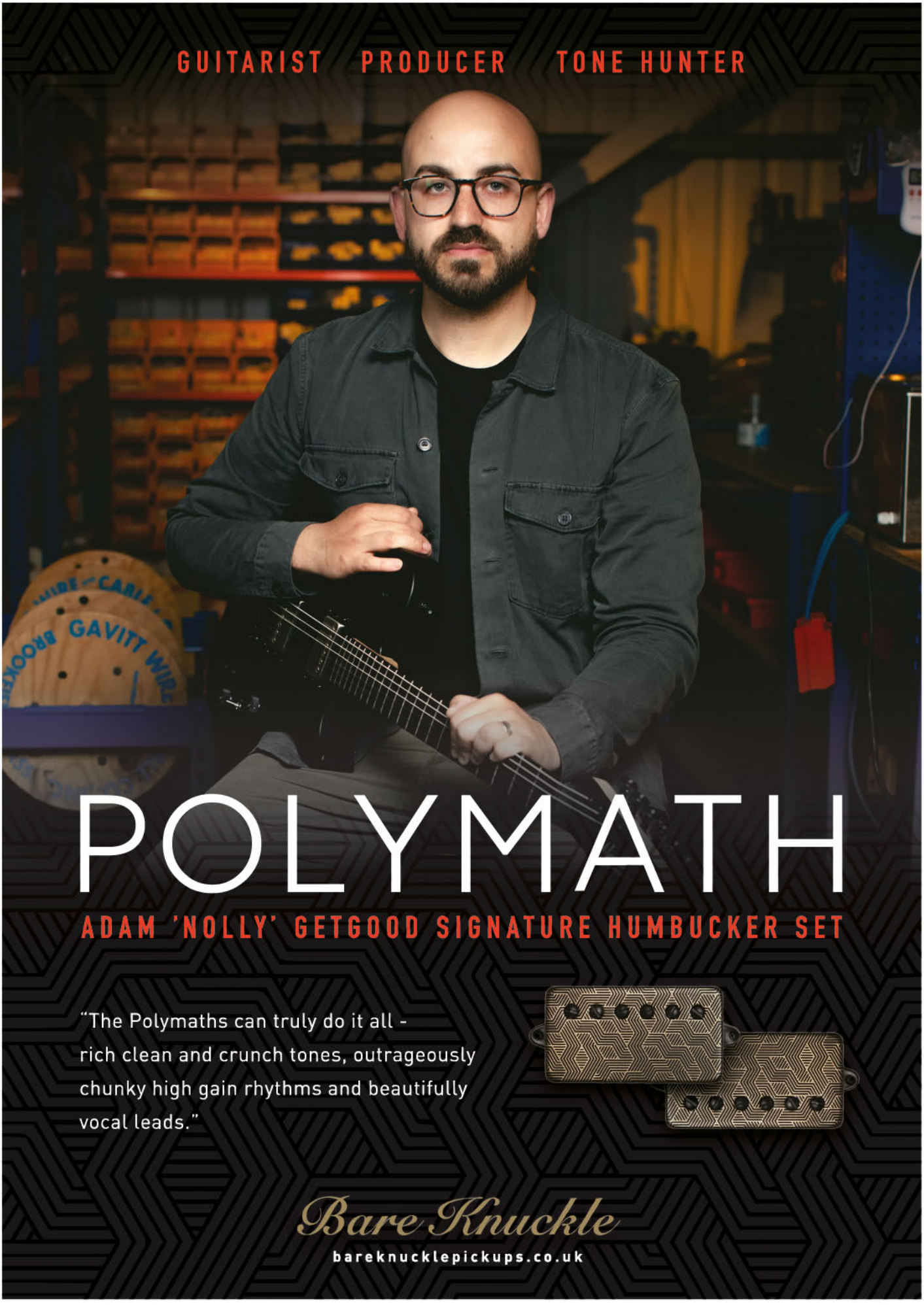
Hailing from Auckland, New Zealand, The Beths are an indie-pop quartet whose knack for creating upbeat, distortion-drenched earworms has propelled them onto an international stage. The idea is simple, explains singer and guitarist Elizabeth Stokes: "We just really like pop songs and arranging them in a way that's fun to us, which is with guitars." Lead guitarist Jonathan Pearce adds with a smile, "We're a band with an unofficial official 'no synthesisers' rule."

September sees the release of their third LP, *Expert In A Dying Field* – an album largely recorded at Pearce's studio, which houses an ever-growing collection of pedals and vintage New Zealand-made amplifiers. In fact, you won't find a single Fender amp tone on the record – a rarity in the indie-pop world. The band's sound is instead characterised by the lesser-recognised tones of the Fountain Mustang 30, the Jansen Bassman and Jansen 6 Twenty.

The Fountain, which according to Stokes "is vaguely Vox-style and really, really bright," is a particular favourite that Pearce uses for much of his lead work, while the Bassman is what he describes as "honestly quite a strange sounding amp". Consisting of a 1x12" speaker in a tall, upright box with a closed back, the pair discovered that – assisted by a Wampler Plexi Drive Deluxe – they could use it to produce "a very convincing high gain Marshall full stack sound", at a fraction of the volume.

Pearce reveals that the session's mantra was: "many sounds are quite good, but could do with more distortion." The stars of this department were a King of Clone and a Chase Bliss Brothers pedal. Elsewhere, three-dimensional layers were added by recording two amps simultaneously with different delays. Explains Pearce, "One amp's pretty much dry and one's through a characterful delay pedal on a 100% wet setting. You pan them hard left and hard right, and it spatialises it."

While their pedalboards might be stuffed with toys, the pair keep it simpler when it comes to guitars, and each has one dependable workhorse. Pearce's is a 1978 Gibson Les Paul Deluxe Goldtop that he had shipped over from the States, while Stokes opts for the more contemporary look and feel of a G&L Tribute Series Fallout with a P-90 in the neck position and humbucker in the bridge. "I'm a bit of a contrarian," she laughs, "so it's nice having a guitar that not many people play."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